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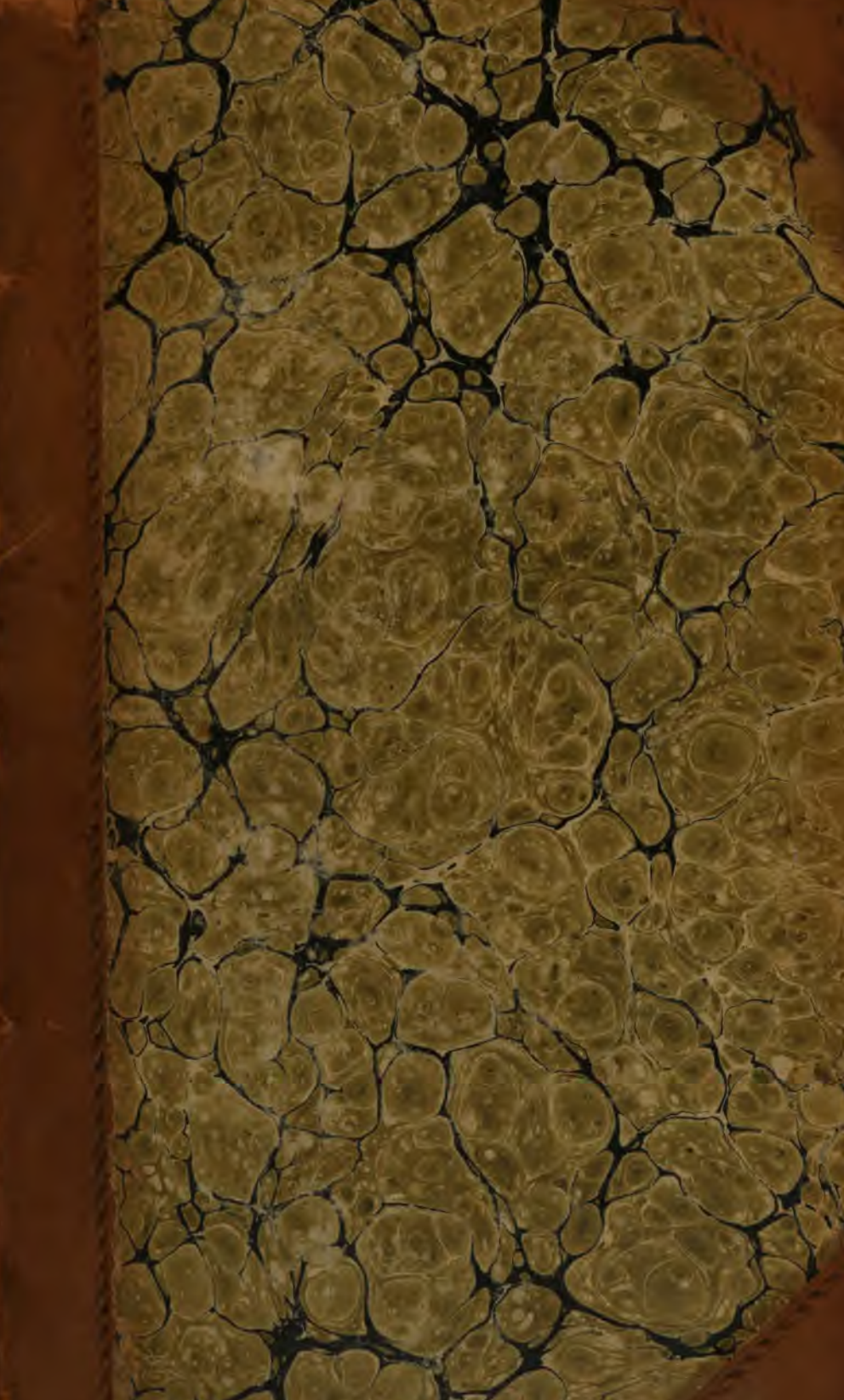
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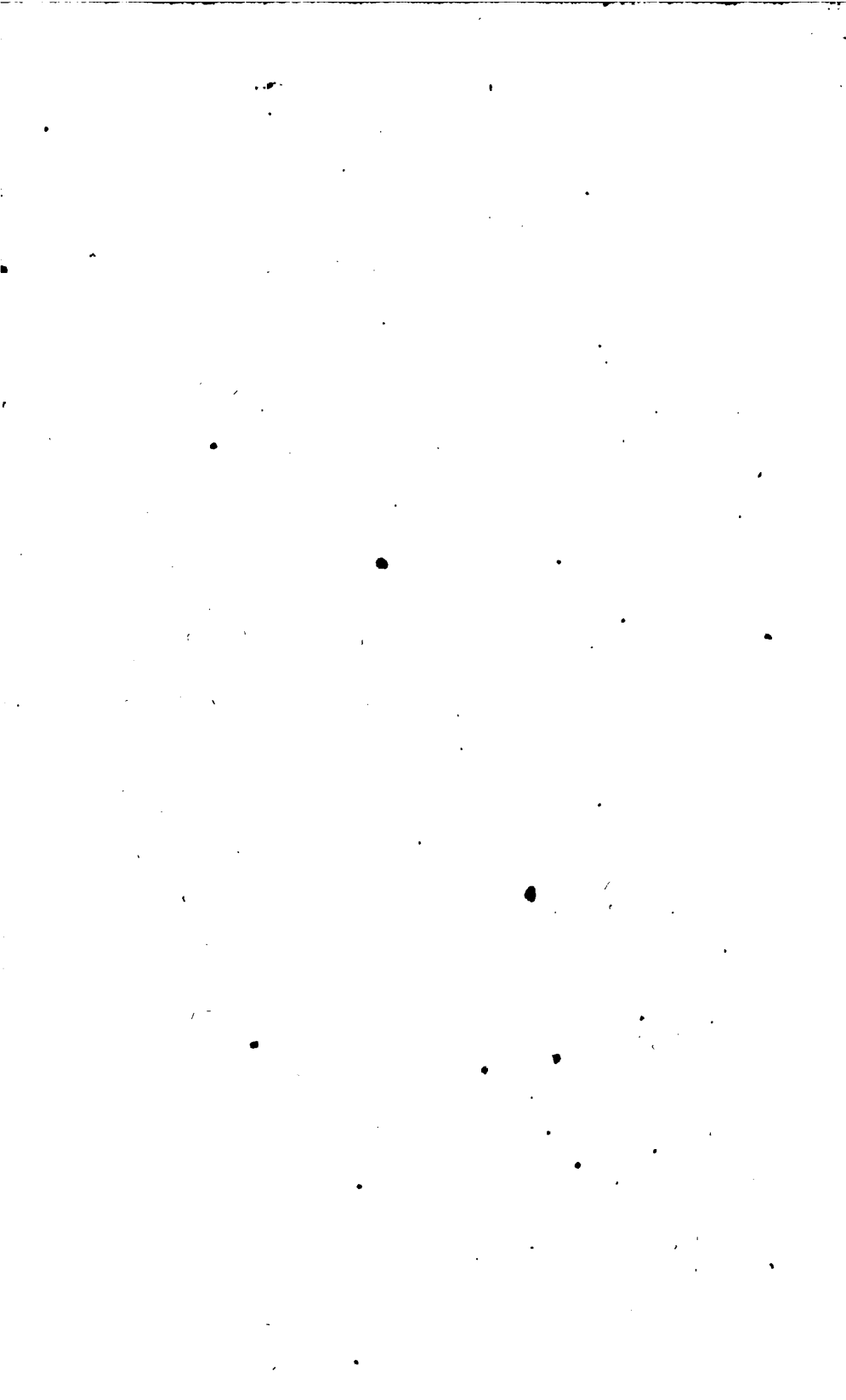
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1824

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SERMONS

ON

PRACTICAL AND DOCTRINAL SUBJECTS.



J. H. 1825

SIXTEEN SERMONS

ON

PRACTICAL AND DOCTRINAL SUBJECTS.

BY THE

REV. B. T. H. COLE, A.M.

RECTOR OF WARBLETON, SUSSEX,

AND LATE FELLOW OF MAGDALEN COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

LONDON :

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1824.

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LONDON:
PRINTED BY E. GILBERT,
ST. JOHN'S-SQUARE.

TO THE
RIGHT REVEREND
CHARLES JAMES,
LORD BISHOP OF CHESTER.

MY LORD,

IN commending the following pages to your protection, I am gratified by the opportunity of offering this tribute to your merits as a Scholar and Divine, and of expressing my congratulations upon that elevation of rank, which they are, so eminently calculated to illustrate and adorn.

Should these Discourses be thought to promote in any degree the diffusion of religious feelings, I shall be proud that they justify your Lordship's permission to prefix

your name, and ever reflect with pleasure
that you authorized their introduction to
the public under your sanction.

I have the honor to be,

My Lord,

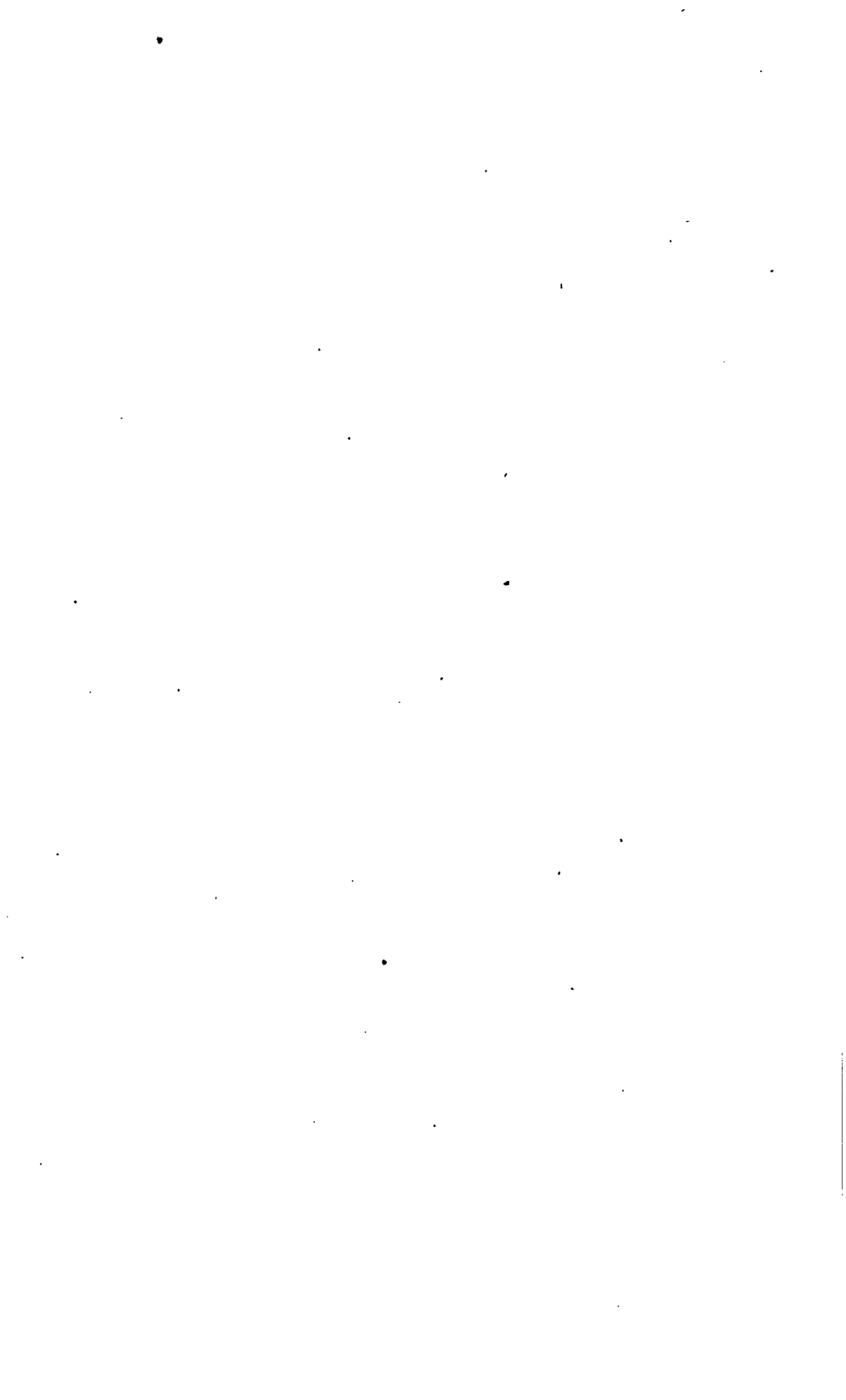
Your obliged and obedient Servant,

BENJ. T. H. COLE.

*Warbleton Parsonage,
July, 1824.*

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Sermons here presented to the public were composed at various times; and the Author's principal intention was to place in a clear and intelligible light the necessity of those three great requisites for forming the Christian character—Humility, Faith, and Obedience. He trusts, therefore, that they may be found useful in enforcing the union of belief and practice, and the conviction that they contribute to that end, will amply repay him for his humble exertions in the cause of Christianity.



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SERMON I.

LUKE XVII. 17.

Were there not ten cleansed, but where are the nine?

MANY and various are the directions contained in Scripture for our edification, all proceeding from the same fountain of life and light, the Spirit of truth and love. Whatever Prophets have proclaimed and Apostles taught: whatever has been veiled in the types and mysteries of the Law, or more openly displayed under the Gospel dispensation, all bear the stamp of the same divine original, all tend to accomplish the same great end, the instruction, sanctification, and salvation of mankind. Every precept, every parable, every separate or connected remark has its peculiar utility; while they unite to impress upon the mind, as the foundation and frame-work of our spiritual temple, the necessity of humility, faith, and obedience. The moralist may plume himself upon the

correctness of his views, and the consistency of his conduct ; and, taking human laws or the voice of nature for his guide, may claim and receive the meed of human approbation ; but unless the “love of Christ worketh in him, to will and to do,” unless he has learned to cast behind him the pomp, the pleasure, and the pride of life, and to consider every act of duty simply as the test of obedience to that adorable Mediator who died to redeem him, the thoughts of his heart are vain, and his deeds perish with him. However great the sacrifices which we have made in order to promote the happiness of others ; however numerous our self-denials, it is upon our faith alone, as the active principle of these works of obedience, that we depend for final acceptance : and he who has opened in Shiloh a fountain for uncleanness, commends the sincere and active believer with irresistible eloquence to the mercy of the Eternal, by his own unspotted life and meritorious death. Not, however, every degree and mode of belief is effectual to save ; nor are temporary and incidental services sufficient to prove the strength and ardour of our attachment. Faith is required to be

constant and persevering ; to regulate the thoughts, the temper, and the affections ; to guide the reason, to purify the heart. From its very nature it is gradual and progressive ; and if, in its early stages it introduces us to that Almighty One whose "favor is life," as we advance to the consummation of our hopes, it ensures us a participation of that unbounded loving-kindness, which is "better than life itself."

These remarks are forcibly illustrated by the miraculous cure of the ten lepers related in St. Luke ; and their history at the same time affords a lamentable proof of the feebleness of human gratitude, and the general instability of our purposes.

Leprosy is unknown to our happy clime, but it was common to the eastern nations, and of a nature so loathsome and infectious, that those who were afflicted with it were forbidden by the law of Moses from entering into any of the cities of Judah. A company of men thus deeply and heavily afflicted had peculiar claims upon the mild and compassionate Jesus, who readily attended to their united prayer, that he "would have mercy upon them and heal them." Desirous, how-

ever, that every ordinance which had been established for the protection of the community should be strictly fulfilled, he did not heal them upon the spot; but directed them to go and shew themselves to the priest, whose duty it was to inspect the patient and certify the cure; thereby inculcating a reverence for the laws of his country, as well as making trial of their obedience. Had he performed the miracle immediately upon their request, such an injunction would have been useless. The first motion of their own minds would have been to have complied with the Mosaic command, for they could not regain admittance into society without the testimony of those who ministered about the altar. But he desired them to go, while they were yet in their uncleanness. If they really believed in his divine power they would obey; and their obedience was rewarded by their cure. "It came to pass that as they went, they were cleansed." Their cleansing was not delayed until they had come to the priest, lest the performance should be attributed to him; but it was accomplished at a moment when no doubt could be entertained of its author;

and in a manner which greatly increased its glory. As they were not permitted to approach him, the cure could not be perfected in consequence of any outward application; and its not taking place till they were out of sight shewed that, present, or absent, the powers of heaven waited upon his will; that he was omnipresent as well as omnipotent, and had an universal insight into the secrets of the human heart.

Let us now enquire what effect this merciful deliverance had upon the lepers themselves. That it was followed by marks of the liveliest joy, attended with mutual congratulations, cannot be doubted; and we should also suppose, that in the warmth of their gratitude, they instantly returned to their deliverer thankful for the unmerited mercy which they had experienced, and acknowledging their conviction that he was indeed "that prophet which should come into the world." The evangelist informs us, that "one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice, glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan." Ten

were healed ; ten had received assurance of his mercy, and conviction of his power ; only one returned to acknowledge his Saviour, and pour out the fulness of a grateful heart. Nine were Israelites, of the seed of Abraham, the heirs of the promises, the chosen of the Most High ; one was an alien and an outcast. The nine had continual access to the writings of the prophets, and worshipped, by divine command, in the temple of their God : one was led astray by the corrupt traditions of his fathers, and prostrated himself before an altar built in direct defiance of the declared will of the Most High. Those to whom a purer revelation was vouchsafed, who looked at that precise period for the coming of the Son of David, and who evidently believed the report, that Jesus of Nazareth was the Anointed of the Lord, refused to pay him the honor which was his due, even after such practical experience of his identity ; he who lived in constant breach of the divine command, his adversary in religious tenets, his enemy by birth, cast from him every personal and national prejudice, and returned in haste, with a loud voice proclaiming his glory.

Well did the Saviour of the world know that the baser passions of the soul prevented those from returning, who, as Israelites, should have been foremost in their gratitude, and most ardent in their faith; and he gave utterance to this just but mild rebuke, "Were there not ten cleansed, but where are the nine? there are not found to give glory to God save this stranger." A general habit of ingratitude, fear of their rulers who had denounced all that should believe on him, or a total indifference to any but selfish feelings, made them only anxious to fulfil the obligations of the law, in order that they might be restored to the rights of society; while he who was most obnoxious to punishment as a natural enemy, and the least likely to meet with protection against the fanaticism of the Jewish magistrates, braved every danger in order to perform a sacred duty; and most plainly shewed, that his faith was not subservient to circumstances, or regulated by the prospect of temporal prosperity, but founded upon that rock which no tempests could shake, and most anxious to make public profession of its sincerity.

The merciful Jesus was never weary of bestowing; and the humble believer can never fail of his reward. To the prayers of the afflicted lepers, he granted cleansing from bodily imperfections : to the penitent and prostrate disciple, he grants the cleansing of the spirit. "And he said unto him, arise, go thy way ; thy faith hath made thee whole." They were all delivered from the stain of leprosy in consequence of such a degree of faith, as led them to obey a present command, in the hope of an immediate benefit ; but he who returned, his mouth filled with the praises of his Creator, and his heart humbled in the presence of his God, received from the lips of his Saviour the assurance of that remission of mental impurities which is never denied to a true and lively faith ;—such a faith as leads us to the feet of the blessed Jesus with the innocence of childhood, listening with the same teachable disposition to the lessons of our Redeemer.

We learn from this relation, how ready God is at all times to attend to the prayers of his afflicted creatures ; how vast is the difference between a spurious and a real faith—a momentary impulse and a perma-

nent conviction ; and that those who are truly grateful for benefits already received, will continue to enjoy additional proofs of the Divine protection and goodness, until they are fulfilled with all spiritual grace and heavenly benediction.

It does not appear that these lepers were at all prepared, either by their temper of mind, or their previous habits of life, to be proper objects of their Saviour's beneficence. People who are outcasts from the pale of society, have certainly no strong public motive to be watchful over their moral conduct, or circumspect in their conversation. A solitary individual might indeed be recalled to a sense of his unworthiness by so heavy a judgment, and led to seek for consolation and hope where alone they are to be found : but ten such persons assembled together were likely, by mutual complaints, to irritate the malevolent passions, and to add fuel to the flame. Their conversation would probably turn upon the gulph placed between themselves and the rest of their brethren, whence hatred and envy would be engendered, and perhaps violent resolutions formed to make themselves amends by robbery and

force for the accidents of fortune. The softer affections would be deadened by want of social intercourse, and a spirit of general enmity substituted for them. Thus unhappily circumstanced, these ten persons heard of the wonderful works of Christ Jesus, who went about healing the sick, casting out devils, and removing every kind of disease; and that hope, so common to man, which is never blind to the remotest prospect of alleviation, induced them to apply to him for relief. A very slight degree of faith was necessary to make them persist in their first determination, and obey his directions to go and shew themselves to the priest. Their situation could not be made worse by the trial; their time was of no value; and, if the experiment succeeded, they would at once be restored to all that constitutes the happiness of man below, their rights as citizens, their kindred and their home. Such, probably, were the considerations which influenced them and regulated their conduct. In how gracious a light does this reflection place the loving-kindness of our merciful Redeemer, who suffered them not to ask a second time, although he must have per-

fectly known and appreciated the motives of their request. His word had gone forth; his promises are never to be broken.—“Ask and ye shall have; knock and it shall be opened unto you.” He does not in the first instance require an implicit faith. A mind so far divested of prejudice, as to enquire earnestly and honestly after revealed truths, is sure to receive assistance from above, and to be further stimulated to religious pursuits by the consolations of the Spirit. The gate is open to all. Let not then the poor imagine that they have no part in the blessings of the Gospel; let them not be cast down because they feel within themselves no violent emotion, carrying them irresistibly forward to the foot of the altar. The chief ends of the Messiah’s coming are thus set forth by the prophet Isaiah, speaking in the person of Christ.—“The spirit of the Lord is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek, he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” And Jesus, in

answer to the disciples of John, gave it as one of the strongest proofs that he was indeed the promised seed, that "the poor had the gospel preached to them." And they may rest perfectly satisfied, that every one who diligently and with pious intentions enquires after the means of his salvation, will be led, by the grace of God, into the way of eternal life; and will continually be strengthened with such divine assistance as will enable him to persevere in the pursuit. The Holy Spirit never acts violently and irresistibly, as if binding in chains the human will, but proposes Religion to our view in her most winning and engaging form; suggests continual motives to her love; and leads us onward, by gentle gradations, until we have entirely surrendered to her our mind and our heart.

But if we are truly zealous in the cause of our Creator, if we desire to approach him with something more than the homage of the lips, we shall begin by divesting ourselves of those overweening anxieties which constantly rise up in our path like thorns, and choke the good seed of the word. Man is, generally speaking, a selfish being;

and when we consider the present constitution of society, the little regard that is commonly paid to any thing but personal comforts, and the exclusive attention given by persons of every rank and situation to the marks of temporal prosperity, we shall see less reason to wonder at the habits of the interested, and stronger inducements to keep unwearied watch over our passions, and to "pray without ceasing" that we may be delivered from temptations which so easily beset us. In time of danger or calamity, when the storm threatens from a distance; or when the diseases of the body have weakened and brought low the energies of the soul, we run for relief wherever there is the slightest prospect of obtaining it: we bethink ourselves of the gross neglect of which we have been guilty, in regard to the most important duties, and "get us to our God right humbly." Misfortune is at once the chastisement and the corrective of the soul. But when our troubles are at an end, when we have outlived the wholesome terrors of the Lord, the past appears but as a dreadful dream; and the chastening, as well as the

good resolutions consequent upon it, are alike consigned to oblivion.

While the lepers had any thing to expect, they were not only loud and importunate in their requests, but ready to listen and to obey. When their prayers had been granted, and their infirmities healed, every grateful emotion appears to have been absorbed in selfish considerations; and that humility and faith which had sprung up and flourished in adversity, were quickly withered under the scorching sunshine of prosperity. A real and efficacious faith, my brethren, is indifferent to the change of times and seasons; in adversity, it prays for strength of mind and enduring patience; under happier auspices, it offers up its fervent petition for obedient passions, and a will regulated and restrained by the revealed laws of the Eternal. It refers to the Almighty Father of the universe, the origin of every good and every perfect gift; and having ascertained the source from which all our blessings flow, it hastens with the poor Samaritan to perform the most imperative duty of the spiritual debtor, and pour

forth the effusion of its gratitude at the feet of its Benefactor and its God. A spurious faith is clamorous in public and prodigal of vows ; deep-rooted confidence in the mercy and truth of the Eternal is more careful to render an acceptable offering, than to publish the sacrifice ; and before it presents itself in the general worship of the temple, it humbles itself in the solitude of the chamber to him who seeth in secret, who is sole judge of the purity and sincerity of man.

It is an additional inducement to cultivate this temper of mind, to know that we shall continue to advance in our progress towards perfection as long as we testify a proper sense of former benefits, and an active compliance with the divine commands. The treasures of heaven are extensive as they are lasting. An earthly monarch may lavish honors and rewards upon a meritorious subject, till the one has nothing left to bestow, nor the other to expect ; the Majesty of heaven proportions his gifts, not to our poor deservings, but to our enlarged capacity for enjoyment ; and he who appears to be nearest the goal, has made very little

progress in the race of eternity. The prize for which we are contending, is an immortal crown; but there are many mansions in that heavenly and enduring city, and ineffably great as will be the reward of our perseverance in this infancy of being, it may bear no comparison with the recompence reserved for future exertions, for "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath reserved for them that love him." The Samaritan, in the gospel before us, having experienced the benefit of the healing power, returned in order to acknowledge the debt, and make confession of his faith. Little did he expect that a more miraculous cure awaited him, even the cleansing of the soul; and that he should receive from the lips of his Saviour the declaration of his integrity. Yet such is the progress of our life. Man is continually surprised with benefits equally unexpected and undeserved; and he who receives with thankfulness, and enjoys with a contented mind, the temporal blessings vouchsafed him, is sure to be more abundantly endowed with the gifts of the Spirit. Heaven sometimes

hurries us, by rapid transitions, from the depth of misery to the pinnacle of fortune, both by way of trial and reward; and it not unfrequently happens, that when we are farthest from hope, we are nearest to consolation. To be driven from the society of man; to be afflicted with a loathsome disease; to be compelled to keep company with those who would at any other period be objects of aversion and disgust, is surely to have made no slight progress in the stages of human calamity. How rapid, how surpassing wonder the change! The decree is gone forth; and nine of these afflicted wanderers are restored to health, to kindred, to the exercise of the social affections, to the intercourse of the world! The tenth is received into the society of a more enduring city, into the bosom of a more extensive family, with the assurance of mental tranquillity and eternal glory. How justly might he apply to himself the declaration of his God, "in a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee."

I cannot, my beloved brethren, conclude this subject, without impressing upon your

minds the quality which made the prayer of the lepers so acceptable to the Saviour of mankind. It was not an enumeration of former merits, nor a reliance upon their claim as children of the promise, which interested him in their favour ; but the humbling confession of their infirmities and weakness. " Jesus, Master, have mercy upon us, and heal us !" So loathsome was their disease, that were I to enter upon the description, the least sensitive hearer would recoil from it with horror ; yet did we, my Christian friends, earnestly and scrupulously examine our own state, we should be astonished at the impurities by which life is cankered at the root, and turn from the contemplation with loathing and disgust. Man is said, after the flood, to have been " desperately wicked, and the thoughts of his heart " are declared to have been " evil continually." Were it otherwise, were unassisted reason capable of correcting the passions, and raising them above the vanities and follies which here entangle and weigh down the soul, what need would there have been of that Divine Physician who came to restore it to its pristine health and beauty ? He

was sent "not to the whole, but to the sick." "He came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." And as the first thing required of a patient by his medical attendant is the most accurate description which he can give of the symptoms of his malady, so likewise we are required first to make ourselves thoroughly acquainted with the fallen condition, the helplessness, the inborn depravity of our nature, before we can effectually tender a request to the only Being who can relieve, reanimate, and heal us. Lay not then the flattering unction to your souls, that your peculiar and transcendent merits have made you the especial favorites of heaven; nor let the fancied assurance of your own righteousness lead you to neglect the only way which leads to the mansions of eternity. Rather seize the immediate opportunity of that severe scrutiny which must convict you of sin, intemperance, and crime, and throw yourselves with bleeding hearts at the feet of Him who, though perfectly pure and spotless himself, "was numbered with the transgressors." Such humiliation is the posture which becomes sinners self-convicted and self-condemned; and this

alone can relieve you from the primeval curse, through faith in Christ Jesus, and admit you to the communion of the Holy Spirit by obedience to the will of your "Father which is in heaven."

SERMON II.

MARK IX. 24.

Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.

THE lamentable event of man's disobedience led to the depravation of his nature, and opened upon the world the flood-gates of sin and woe. The father of the human race, having forfeited the favour of his Maker, was no longer strengthened by those spiritual aids which had hitherto enabled him to walk onward in the direct path of his duty; and at once subjected himself to a host of passions, the melancholy forerunners of crime, disease, and death. He was at the same time incapable of making atonement in thought, word, or action, for the enormity of his transgression; and his best resolves became so tainted and polluted with evil, as to shrink from the scrutiny of a just and holy God. This doctrine is plainly deducible from the history of the creation, and

the whole tenor of the scriptures elucidates and confirms it. It is a doctrine too, the belief of which is justly considered of the utmost importance, as preparing the mind for the reception of that gospel which brought life and immortality to light. In discoursing, however, upon this subject, we are too apt to lose sight of the main instrument, by whose agency the fall of man was effected; and whose consequent influence over the impulses and affections of his mind, would have known neither limit nor restraint, but for the gracious promise of restoration through the merits and intercession of a Redeemer. The nature and extent of this influence seem lately to have been thrown into the shade, and the ridicule unsparingly levelled at the belief of it, tends to impose silence, as a measure of policy and prudence, on many of the serious professors of Christianity. To avoid such disputed points as are not necessary to salvation, may easily be defended and justified by the authority of undeniable precedents; but the subject under consideration is so clearly fortified by the concurrent testimony of the inspired writers, and a proper appre-

ciation of it is so important to our welfare, that it would be a dereliction of duty to consign it to obscurity. The enemy is well aware, that the fortress of Christianity is too strongly built upon a rock to be carried by general assault ; but he hopes to undermine the out-works by separate attack, and by secret and insensible advances to succeed at last in planting upon her towers the banners of infidelity.

It is not my present intention to enter at large into this discussion, but these observations naturally lead to the consideration of a miracle, in which the kingdom of God is personally exalted over the powers of darkness, and which shews the superiority of faith even when exerted against those principalities and thrones, who, by the first man's transgression, obtained so extensive a dominion over his degraded posterity.

Let me now solicit your attention to the extraordinary scene which was exhibited to the view of the Saviour, as he descended from mount Tabor, after his transfiguration. Behold on one side the disciples filled with shame and dismay at their inability to perform the cure which had been required of

them; on the other, the unhappy father of the dæmoniac with subdued hopes and an agonized heart. See here the Scribes commenting with unfeigned delight upon their momentary triumph; there the assembled multitudes eagerly listening to their malicious insinuations, and anxiously waiting the issue of the event. How noble, how affecting was the conduct of the blessed Jesus at that decisive moment! How amply did he confirm the predictions of the prophets, and the rumours of his fame! He loses no time in useless enquiries, but hastens to administer consolation and relief. Having in few words rebuked the Scribes for that obstinate and acrimonious spirit which is wilfully blind to conviction, and continually upon the watch for occasions of cavil and misconception, he proceeds practically to illustrate the nature and efficacy of that faith so essential to the character of piety; which, conscious of the weakness and impotence of man, never enters upon any religious consideration without first humbling itself in the presence of the Almighty Power who created and sustains the universe, and addressing to him its earnest prayer that he would guard

his servant from error and unbelief, and so illumine his mental sight as to enable him to perceive and distinguish the things that be of man, and the things that be of God. And in order to impress more strongly upon the minds of the assembled multitudes the necessity of this unpresuming and well-regulated confidence, he first questions the father of the afflicted youth upon this point, and then makes the actual accomplishment of the miracle about to be performed to depend upon the purity of his faith. The answer deserves to be engraven upon the heart of every Christian. It sums up in one short sentence all that the most elaborate discourse could have conveyed; and had we been witnesses to the manner, the expression, the chastened anxiety of the suppliant; had we listened to those indescribable tones with which nature has ever gifted the language of emotion, and whose impression is electric upon the soul; had we beheld the agonizing conflict of repentance and hope—repentance for momentary distrust, and hope returning with returning confidence; I am convinced that neither time, circumstance, nor place, could have erased the picture

from our memory ; and that we should never enter the temple of our God without making the personal application, and prefacing our humble devotions with the secret prayer of the heart, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief." The sincerity of this declaration obtained for the suppliant the fulfilment of his request. "When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried and rent him sore, and came out of him, and he was as one dead, insomuch that many said, he is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose." Thus did the Saviour of the world bear testimony to the source whence he received his commission and derived his power ; and while he refuted the insinuations of the Scribes, and rewarded the humble and sincere believer, he strongly contrasted the conduct of the latter with that of his own disciples, and plainly indicated the cause of their inability to perform the miracle. Yet so blind is man to his own imperfections, and so unwilling to

listen to unpleasant truths, that the disciples drew him aside afterwards, and enquired of him privately "why could not we cast him out? And he said unto them, this kind can come forth by nothing but by prayer and fasting." Having before publicly pointed out the necessity of faith, and its miraculous efficacy, he now mentions the causes which had conspired to make them lukewarm and spiritless. It appears that they had too much neglected the sacred duty of prayer, and had not been sufficiently careful to keep the body in subjection. Not that they had incurred the guilt of impiety or intemperance, but that they had of late been less ardent in their applications to the throne of grace, and less strict in exercises of habitual mortification, than became men chosen by the Holy Spirit of God out of the whole nation of the Jews, to propagate a religion of purity and peace; whose doctrines were to be confirmed by miracles, whose precepts were to be illustrated by example, and whose truth was to be maintained under the pressure of poverty and disease, in pain and in sickness, under the terrors of approaching dissolution, and amidst the agonies of ex-

cruciating and ignominious deaths. There is every reason to believe, from the subsequent relation of the Evangelists, that this rebuke was attended with the most salutary effects; and in the hope that some portion of its beneficial influence may be extended to us, let us make a few observations, as they naturally arise, upon the principal points of the history, and endeavour to apply them individually to the establishing our faith, and regulating our practice. All the narratives in the scriptures abound with circumstances and reflections peculiar to the age in which they were written, the occasions which gave rise to, and the persons who were concerned in them; but they are recorded for our instruction; and there is not one from which a pious mind may not derive information of serious importance, both for correcting the judgment and improving the heart.

The first and most natural enquiry which suggests itself, respects the nature of the malady with which the patient was afflicted. "I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; and whensoever he taketh him, he teareth him; and

he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away." The apostle St. Jude, speaking of the punishments inflicted aforetime of God, upon "them that believed not," says, "the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." Whence we learn, that some of those immortal spirits, who shared in a superior degree the happiness of their Creator, and were admitted to behold his glory, had risen in rebellion against him, and had consequently been driven from his presence under the dreadful sentence of everlasting condemnation. Thus shorn of their glory, and outcasts of hope, the power which they were still permitted to retain appears to have been actively exerted in opposing the divine decrees, and particularly in undermining the tranquillity of man. Shortly after the creation, we find one of them under the form of the serpent, assailing the woman, and inciting her to disobedience. At the death of Moses, the immediate minister and peculiar favorite of heaven, we hear Satan disputing for his body with the archangel of God. At all times, and in all countries,

we find him exerting his secret influence over the passions, and instigating to the commission of sin and crime. Immediately previous to the coming of Christ, we see him enter into the human frame, tormenting the body, and exercising the most despotic sway over the will. This privilege, however, appears to have been restrained to the term of our Saviour's sojourn upon earth; and seems to have been permitted as the means of affording supernatural evidence, that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the seed promised to the Patriarchs, the Son of Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel. The words, therefore, of St. Mark, combined with those of St. Matthew, who, speaking of the same miracle, says, "Jesus rebuked *the devil*, and he departed out of him;" and compared with the concurrent testimony of all the Scriptures as to the existence of *dæmoniacs* at that time, leave no doubt but that the body of this young man was actually possessed by an evil spirit, who had entered into him while he was yet a child, and who, not content with depriving him of the sense of hearing and the powers of speech, persisted in tormenting him with unceasing malignity.

But we now turn to the disciples, whose inability to expel the unclean spirit is the more remarkable, because they had been previously endowed by their Lord with the gift of working miracles ; and we learn, by their own confession, that during their ministerial journey throughout Judea, the devils themselves had, in every instance, been obedient to their commands. Here St. Matthew supplies an omission of St. Mark, and records the declaration of their Master, that their failure was occasioned by their unbelief. When they were first sent forth, they received the heavenly gift with meekness and gratitude ; they exercised that austere temperance which prepared their bodies to be fit habitations of the Spirit, and they prefaced every miraculous work with earnest prayer, referring all the honor to the Almighty Disposer of events, considering themselves as his weak and humble instruments, and intreating that he would forward their honest intentions only as far as they could contribute to the advancement of his glory. But now they appear to have been inflated with success : to have neglected their usual exercises of

temperance and prayer as unnecessary severities ; to have thrown off, in some degree, that feeling of dependence which had so peculiarly marked the outset of their ministry ; and perhaps too, in the fulness of spiritual pride, they had taken considerable credit to themselves for the fidelity and success with which they had executed their commission, and had begun to value the sacred deposit chiefly as the means of increasing their influence, and extending their authority. If such was indeed the temper of their minds, can we wonder that the Holy Spirit should desert them for a season, and leave them a prey to that confusion and remorse, which attend the sudden privation of accustomed power, and whose sting was made more bitter by the pity of their friends and the derision of their enemies ? Such was their lamentable situation when Jesus descended from the mount ; and when they contemplated the different effects of their conduct upon the surrounding multitude, how ardently must they have prayed for, yet dreaded his coming ! The failure consequent upon their unbelief, had confirmed the obstinacy of the Scribes, and

probably enabled them to shake the faith of many in the crowd. It had evidently operated on the mind of the afflicted father, who had addressed a simple request to the disciples, in full confidence of their ability to relieve his son; but who, alarmed at their want of success, applied to Jesus in the language of doubt and hesitation, saying, "if thou canst do this thing, have mercy upon us, and help us." Justly then did they fear the return of him who was ever present in spirit, although absent in body; and the stronger the causes of their terror were, the more reason is there to admire the mildness which would not aggravate their humiliation with reproach, and which left the work of repentance to be completed in solitude and silence. In addressing the Scribes, he employed the severity of rebuke, for their sins were sins of commission, and tended to mislead the ignorant and uninformed to the destruction of their present tranquillity and eternal happiness. His immediate followers had erred, not from intention, but from natural infirmity; he beheld their remorse and left them to their meditations. How truly amiable is this trait of

character, and how full of encouragement to those who, confiding in the truth of the gospel, are anxious to know their duty in order that they may perform it! They are assured, that, whatever impediments the weakness of their nature may throw in the way of their improvement, the God of all mercy will impute no sin, where none has been intended: that he will always vouchsafe to the sincere believer grace to perceive and to correct his errors, and that he will never be so "extreme to mark what is done amiss," as to overwhelm the contrite spirit with the weight of its infirmities.

But if the conduct of our blessed Lord to his disciples is encouraging to the Christian, how much more consoling is his behaviour to the parent, whose error, if it may deserve so harsh a name, was entirely the consequence of their infirmity. On his descent from the Mount, he inquires into the cause of the commotion; he listens with complacency; he rebukes the offending scribes; he replies to the caution of involuntary fear with an encouraging assurance; and having thus reanimated the spirits, and elevated the hopes of the anxious suppliant, he pro-

nounces the irrevocable word, the unfailing pledge, the fiat of the God. The fears, the transport, the gratitude of the father, I leave to the painting of your own imaginations; but I must call your attention for a moment to the discomfited Scribes, who were so ready to attack, and to exult over the misfortunes of their brethren. A few moments since they were elated with joy, expecting that that evening's sun would set for ever upon the professors of Christianity. Behold, now they stand "darkling and alone," eating their own hearts in silence. Driven to their last resource by former miracles, and publicly accused of blasphemy, in imputing to Beelzebub works which could only be performed by the finger of God, they steal secretly away; and convicted, but unconvinced, they quit the field, and retire, not to the contemplative shade for the purposes of sober meditation, but where machinations, engendered by discontent, may best be consolidated in darkness.

There still remains one circumstance of considerable importance, inasmuch as it completes the allegory of human life. The disciples, the scribes, the father of the child,

represent man under the various impressions of doubt, of unbelief, and of faith. The *dæmoniac* himself is an emblem of youth, preyed upon by the passions, distracted with worldly cares, and hurried from one scene of riot and dissipation to another, till every sense is steeped in the waters of oblivion. The evil spirit had tormented him from his childhood, and "oft-times it had cast him into the fire, and into the waters to destroy him." And when Jesus commanded it to come out of him, "it cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him, and he was as one dead, insomuch that many said, he is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up, and he arose." Thus it is with us in the morning of life. Our ungoverned appetites become our masters; they tear us from ourselves; they hurry us into perils by fire and by flood; and having made us incapable of asking our way, and deaf to the voice of remonstrance, they take possession of the whole man, and hurry us blindly onwards to destruction. Sometimes indeed the grace of God induces better thoughts; but the body weakened by indulgence, and the soul unfortified by exercises

of habitual piety, like the evil spirit when commanded by the inefficacious faith of the disciples, neglect the call, and disregard the warning. Should we, however, so far listen to the suggestions of the Holy Spirit as to throw off the shackles of sin, and apply ourselves to the contemplation of heavenly things with serious purposes of amendment, our former companions proclaim us lost to all that constitutes the pleasure and happiness of life, and consider us to be as completely dead to the intercourse of the world, as if our bodies had actually returned to dust, and our souls to him who gave them. Yet it is then only that we begin to live ; it is then that we wake to valuable interests ; then all around us wears the appearance of a new existence, of a renovated world : in imagination we look back to that valley of death, where lie buried the crude affections of our earliest days, and we press eagerly forward to the participation of those intellectual enjoyments which derive all the gratification they bestow from the influences of religion, and are indeed a foretaste of immortality.

Believe me, my friends, the picture which

I have attempted to draw is by no means overcharged. Its colouring will bear to be judged by the strictest rules, and viewed in the strongest light. Regard it then as drawn from scenes, whose record is the Word of eternal truth ; reflect upon the prospects which that Book of Life discloses to your view ; and, whether you escape from the conflict of the passions to the calm seclusion of religious retreats, or are passing through the last mortal conflict towards the heavenly Canaan, may you be met and supported by that Almighty Saviour who raised the fallen dæmoniac, and who will gently lead his followers by the hand of faith through the troubles and temptations of this world, to regions of unspeakable delight and unfading verdure.

SERMON III.

JOB XLII. 56.

*I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear ;
but now mine eye seeth thee ; wherefore I abhor
myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*

THE book of Job is unrivalled for noble and sublime images, and abounds in religious instruction. Being, however, unconnected with the general tenor of Scripture, and not used to establish any particular doctrine, it is chiefly read for the sake of the moral principles which it recommends and inculcates. I shall now endeavour to shew you how strongly it enforces that humility and self-abasement which lay the foundation of an effectual and saving faith ; and which, convincing man of the worthlessness of his own fancied merits to work out his salvation without a vicarious atonement, lead him at last to submit himself to the righteousness of God. For this purpose I shall commence with a short abstract of the history, and then

proceed to illustrate the points which I have mentioned.

Job inhabited the land of Uz, on the south of the Euphrates, and is supposed to have been contemporary with Moses. His religious knowledge was probably derived from the patriarchs; and, either from a clear intuition of early prophecies, or from immediate inspiration, he appears to have been acquainted with the coming of a Redeemer. Distinguished for his honors, the abundance of his wealth, and the happiness of his domestic life, he could boast that his integrity was unimpeached, and that he had never violated the rules of charity and mercy. In the midst of this prosperity, we are told that Satan appeared before God; "and the Lord said unto him, hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, doth Job fear God for nought? Hast thou not made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased

in the land : but put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord." In consequence of this permission, that evil spirit, who accuseth his brethren before God day and night, and whose study it is to bring upon man every present calamity, and eternal death, began without pity or remorse to exercise the power which was granted him. He instigated an irruption of the Sabeans into his fields, who carried away all his oxen and asses, and slew his servants with the edge of the sword. He brought down fire from heaven, which burnt his sheep ; he caused the Chaldeans to carry away his camels, and in one hour he deprived him of his sons and daughters, the stay and comfort of his age, while they were feasting in the house of their elder brother. Such a complication of calamities was surely sufficient to overwhelm a mind indued with a very superior degree of piety and firmness. But Job, instead of cursing God, as his mortal enemy

expected, considered that all which he had enjoyed was bestowed by the Almighty; that the Giver had a right to reclaim his gift; and that he was ever bound to thank him for the blessings which had been vouchsafed him for so long a period. "The Lord gave," said he, "and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." This heavy visitation not being sufficient to shake his piety, Satan again applied to God for permission to afflict his person, which he had before been commanded to spare. The only restraint now imposed was not to touch his life. Accordingly, "he smote him with sore boils, from the sole of his foot unto his crown, and he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes. Then said his wife unto him, dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God and die. But he said unto her, thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips." This last trial ended like the former; every succeeding affliction appeared to add strength to his integrity; and the great enemy of

mankind retired from the contest baffled and overcome. He was afterwards visited by three of his friends celebrated for their wisdom and learning, who appear also to have been men of an upright and religious turn of mind; but who considered all men under affliction as greater sinners than their neighbours, and therefore looked upon Job as suffering for some heavy offence, and drinking justly of the cup of the wrath of God. That we are all born in sin, and conceived in iniquity, is the necessary consequence of the guilt of our first parents, and therefore we are all obnoxious to punishment. But the judgments of heaven are sent not only to chastise, but to try us; to give us an opportunity of manifesting by actions the faith which we profess with our lips; to bring us to a proper sense of our own unworthiness and weakness; and to fit us for that reconciliation with the Universal Parent, which is promised us through the mediation of Christ Jesus.. It was for want of considering afflictions in this light of trials that these friends of Job, instead of comforters, became his accusers; and while their lips breathed the accents of wisdom in

a general sense, they made such a particular application of them as was not warranted by the occasion. How deeply this conduct must have added to his sense of calamity, I need not point out to you: the reproaches and malice of enemies under misfortune are less difficult to bear; there is an energy in the soul of man which revolts within him, and enables him to sustain open attacks with fortitude and patience; but coldness and reserve under misfortunes from those with whom we have been accustomed to associate, are too much for human infirmity. Even the Saviour of the world, supported as the human nature must have been by the Divine, felt the treachery of an Apostle to be a high aggravation of his sufferings; and the Psalmist, speaking in the spirit of prophecy, puts these words into his mouth upon that melancholy occasion; "For it is not an open enemy that hath done me this dishonour, for then I could have borne it; neither was it mine adversary that did magnify himself against me, for then, peradventure, I would have hid myself from him. But it was even thou, my companion, my guide, and mine own familiar friend. We

took sweet counsel together, and walked in the house of God as friends." No wonder then that Job should break out into the language of despair, and lament that he had ever been born. He was reproved by those friends in whom he had put implicit confidence; and the wife of his bosom had advised him to "curse God and die." Yet he was not left without a comforter. The integrity of his former life, and the patience with which he bore his sufferings, without venturing to impeach the justice of the Almighty, had obtained him a friend who is above every human comforter, who, when he pities, is all powerful to relieve; and who will never forsake those who reverence his name; and "keep his commandments to do them." God himself spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, and because he had doubted, not of the justice, but of the wisdom and propriety of his conduct towards him, he first convinces him of his weakness and ignorance, and bids him consider the many creatures of which the world is composed, and the admirable order of nature. This meditation is very necessary to make us sensible of the Divine Majesty, and of our own

meanness ; and as the works of God are so great and wonderful that we cannot comprehend them, nor find out their nature, causes, and effects, we ought to adore with reverence so wise and powerful a Being ; to submit ourselves to all the orders of his Providence, without pretending to discover all the reasons of his conduct ; and to believe that all which he does in the world, and to us in particular, is done with justice and goodness. It is easy for us to consider the wonders of Providence in the works of creation ; they surround us perpetually ; they are ever before our eyes. Only let us take heed not to be the less affected with these things because we see them daily ; but rather let the reflections which we continually make respecting them, raise our souls to the knowledge of the beneficent Creator, and lead us to love, to adore, and to fear him. The expostulation of the Lord of Hosts had this happy effect upon the subject of our history ; he trembled at the contemplation of his greatness ; he was terrified at his own presumption ; he saw in every act of God the Almighty hand, working for good ; and he felt that renewed spirit of

the mind, of which St. Paul speaks, "putting off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and putting on the new man, which, after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." He had led a life in conformity to the will of God, and no man could accuse him of injustice or want of benevolence. But he had taken pride to himself for having thus performed what is the common duty of mankind; and he had received the blessings of Providence as an equal and necessary reward for the uprightness of his life. When his vast possessions were taken from him, he did not believe it possible that God should in the end be unjust; but his limited view could not perceive the motives of his conduct; and although he suffered for a time with such patience as is grown into a proverb, he at last indulged in the language of complaint. But now he was fully convinced of his own weakness and unworthiness: he saw how utterly unable he was to contend with, or to instruct the Almighty; he felt that the clay has no right to say to the potter, why hast thou made me thus? For he maketh one

vessel to honour and another to dishonour as it pleaseth him. "And he answered the Lord and said, I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered that I understood not, things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear I beseech thee, and I will speak; I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Such was the declaration of the man, who from his earliest infancy had been the favourite of heaven, whose example illustrated all the precepts of human wisdom, and has called forth the admiration of men of every sect of religion in every age. Not that he wanted a thorough conviction of the existence, or was ignorant of the attributes of the Creator; but that he had never before sufficiently considered him through the medium of his works, nor beheld how vast, how infinitely vast, the difference betwixt man and God! He had experienced his benefi-

cence in the verdure of his fields, and the bounties of harvest; he had seen his arm in the lightning, his voice in the thunder, his mercy in the bow of heaven, and he had paid him the homage due to a superior Being, by prayer and praise, by observation and obedience. But so little was he acquainted with the nature of that unutterable Majesty, at whose breath the worlds were made, that he ventured to address him in such language as a subject would use to an earthly prince, with whom his situation admitted him to plead and to advise. What then must have been his terror, his confusion of face, now that he had beheld his glory! "I have heard of thee," he exclaims, "but I have never known thee! My imagination, which has long dwelt upon objects of worldly magnificence, by comparison, had endued thee with power and wisdom infinitely great; but now that thou hast taught me to trace thee through thy works, now that thou hast led me step by step to investigate the wonders of creation, for ever rising in the scale of being; I perceive that the highest opinions which I had formed of thee were contemptible and vile, and that I have as

little pretension to question thy judgments, as the meanest reptile which is born of putridity, and wallows in corruption. I heard of thee, and thought myself justified in the sight of my Maker! But now I behold thee, and am lost! Wherefore I humble myself in the dust before thee; I intreat thy forbearance, I implore thy mercy; and instead of claiming a reward for having obeyed thy will, and walked according to thy commandments, I am grateful for every manifestation of thy favour; but chiefly I am bound to thank thee for the inestimable blessing of a reasoning soul, which has been brought by thy grace to a proper sense of its own unworthiness, and which, by the promised ransom of a Redeemer, is made an heir of immortality."

And we, my beloved brethren, so inferior to Job in every moral, every Christian virtue; have not we also dared to murmur at the dispensations of Providence, and called upon the Creator to plead at the tribunal of his creatures? Have we not been apt to say, "Here he has given too little, there he has bestowed too much? To my neighbour, whose acquaintance with the existence of the Christian dispensation is only proved by the

abuse of it, he has been lavish of the gifts of fortune; while to me, who am a constant attendant on the public service of the church, he has been sparing of the means of necessary support?" Let us no longer indulge in accusations so presumptuous and so vain. His ways are not our ways; and nothing can bear stronger testimony to our ignorance, or the lukewarmness of our faith, than such an attempt to call him into judgment. God is alike merciful in what he gives, and in what he withholds. Privations and afflictions are the most salutary medicines for the diseases of the soul; and no disease is more dangerous than the opinion, that to observe merely the outward forms of Christianity, gives a higher claim to the favour of God. A constant attendance in this sacred place, is indeed a necessary part of Christian duty, but every one who comes to the bridal feast, must be prepared with a wedding garment. That garment is humility. When we enter into the courts of the Lord's house, we must put aside all pride of heart, and be as ready to learn as our blessed Saviour was to teach. Instead of offering up a petition for riches and honours, we must submit ourselves entirely to

the will of the Eternal, and ask only such things as he knows to be most expedient for us. We must above all things divest ourselves of the mistaken notion that riches are a proof of the favour, and poverty of the anger of God. He who judges of a man's spiritual state by the marks of outward prosperity, commits the same offence as the three friends of Job, for which they were severely reprimanded, and to expiate which, a sacrifice was required. Such a man will be led into innumerable mistakes. He will load with reproaches every one who is labouring under a state of trial; and, while he pays undue attention to the wealthy profligate, he will aggravate the misery of those whom the Lord correcteth in mercy. The truly humble Christian will first search his own heart; and, from the many infirmities of which his conscience will convict him, he will be taught to judge with lenity of all who suffer around him. He "will not break the bruised reed, the smoking flax he will not quench;" but he will administer comfort to the afflicted spirit, and endeavour to confirm its trust in him, who has taken away the condemnation which was under the law, who has "swal-

lowed up judgment in victory." To the contrite spirit he will speak the language of pardon and peace ; and having reduced his own headstrong passions to obedience, he will endeavour to set an example of that resignation, which says, with the universal Redeemer, "Not my will, but thine be done ;" and of that enduring patience, which, looking forward with the eye of faith into the heavenly paradise, considers all human afflictions as the surer prelude to a crown of glory.

SERMON IV.

GENESIS I. 27.

So God created man in his own image.

THE first chapter of Genesis contains a succinct account of the works of the Creator, beginning with the elements and ending with man. The second chapter returns to those circumstances which had been before omitted, and describes the manner in which Adam and Eve were made. Every thing which constitutes the human frame was formed of the dust of the earth, capable either of gradual or immediate decay; but the animating spirit was infused by the breath of the Eternal, like him perfectly holy and righteous, inaccessible to decay or death. Immediately after the formation of man, all creatures were ordered to pass before him, in order that he might give them their names. The birds, the beasts, and the fishes had been created in

pairs; man was a solitary being, exercising dominion over the rest, without any one to whom he might communicate the sources of rational enjoyment. God therefore caused a deep sleep to fall upon him, and took one of his ribs of which he made woman; endowing her with the same reasonable faculties, and breathing into her the same spirit of purity and innocence. Adam is supposed to have seen the whole operation in a vision while he slept, and to have understood its meaning. For when Eve was presented to him, he acknowledged her to be of his own flesh, and declared that she should be henceforth his companion and friend; and that in succeeding generations man should consider all the other ties of natural affection subordinate to that which he bore to his wife; nay, that he should even relinquish the offices of filial tenderness, in order to give himself up wholly to those endearing attentions, which were to constitute their mutual happiness. It cannot be doubted but that this institution of marriage had the sanction of Jehovah, for Christ quotes to the Pharisees the words of Adam, affirming that no divorce was lawful, but for the cause of adultery, and that no

human power could separate those who had been made one by God.

Man, having been thus provided with a helpmate and friend, was placed in the garden of Eden, watered by four noble rivers, and spontaneously supplied with every kind of herb and fruit which could gratify the palate, and invigorate the frame. To him pain and labour were alike unknown. No care ruffled his brow, no anxiety disquieted his heart. To watch and aid the progress of vegetable life, to curb and improve the luxuriance of nature, was his salutary exercise; the intercourse of the social affections was a source of perpetual delight; and at times he conversed with angels and immortal forms, commissioned to enlarge his views by the communication of heavenly knowledge, or dispatched on the gracious errands of their Maker. Before him were spread the gratifications of sense, above him the field of rational enquiry; within him was tranquillity, around him God. Little did he imagine that the scene would be so rapidly and irrecoverably changed; and that his early breach of the only prohibition imposed would bring upon him and his posterity the curse of sin,

with her long train of tributary woes, pain, disease and death. Adam partook at the fountain of sorrow; and all his children are doomed to drink of its waters, as the stream flows onward, darkened by guilt, and increased with tears.

Man, placed in a state of happiness, and honoured with visible communications from above, was ignorant that he had a spiritual enemy, who envied his felicity, and was plotting his destruction. God had planted two trees in the middle of the garden, the tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Of every other tree in the garden permission was given to eat freely; but to taste of the fruit of the tree of knowledge was to be followed by certain death. The soul was created immortal, and obnoxious to this sentence in a spiritual sense; the body, formed of the dust of the earth, was by its nature liable to corruption. It was destined however to partake of the immortality of its inmate the soul, unless Adam should at any time transgress the divine command. Whether it was necessary to maintain its vigor by continual application to the tree of life, we are not informed; but it has been con-
 jec-

tured, that the fruit of the tree of knowledge contained a poison, and that the tree of life produced its antidote. For after sentence had been passed upon the criminals, the latter was guarded by a flaming sword, lest they should eat of its fruit, and escape the penalty. In both circumstances, the prohibition and the prevention, we cannot sufficiently admire the goodness of the Creator. The prohibition being not merely a trial of obedience, but a salutary caution against food pregnant with destruction; and the prevention perhaps having become necessary to ensure to the soul that purity and holiness without which immortal life must be immortal woe. Had man after the fall eaten and lived, the stain of guilt would probably have remained for ever; whereas, after having paid the mortal penalty, he was rescued from the eternal condemnation by the atonement of the Redeemer, of whom that tree of life was an emblem; whose leaves are for the healing of the nations, and which shall continue to flourish by rivers of living water.

The great enemy of the human race, whose pride had caused him, with a host of attendant spirits, to be cast down from his high

estate in heaven, had no other means of gratifying his envy of man, and his revenge for the just punishment inflicted by God, than by seducing the former into disobedience. He therefore either assumed the likeness, or actually entered into the body of the serpent, an animal extremely beautiful and gentle, whose instinct approached more nearly than that of other animals to the standard of human reason. The serpent, thus made an instrument, is generally supposed to have been of that species which is gifted with wings, whose appearance in flight is as a flame of fire, and whose name, on account of its dazzling splendour, was given to the Seraphin, a higher order of the Angels. On this account it appears not improbable that the messengers of the Most High had been accustomed to assume this bodily shape, when they conversed with man; and therefore Eve might express no surprize at finding the serpent endued with voice and reason, and be the more easily induced to listen to its suggestions, and follow its counsel. Satan began by assailing the woman when alone, and asked whether it was really true that God had forbidden them to eat of the fruit of the tree

of knowledge. Being informed that it was interdicted on the penalty of death, he assured her that it would be attended with no such consequences, but that their Maker had withheld it from an envious motive, knowing that in the day in which they should eat of it, their eyes would be opened, and they would enjoy the prerogative of gods, knowing good and evil ; a Hebrew phrase, which signifies that they should be ignorant of nothing. Eve, upon this persuasion, ate of the fruit, and plucked some to carry to her husband, who seeing that no apparent ill had in consequence happened to his wife, and being informed by her that the fruit was grateful to the palate, readily partook. Immediately their eyes were opened, and they were endowed with that mental discrimination which draws so accurate a line between the improprieties and decencies of life. They therefore sewed fig-leaves together to cover their nakedness ; and in the cool of the day, perceiving symptoms of the divine presence in the garden, they ran and hid themselves. Being summoned from their hiding-place, they made their nakedness an excuse for their conduct ; and Adam confessed that he

had eaten of the forbidden fruit at the woman's persuasion. The woman laid the fault upon the serpent. Wherefore God, in addition to the penalty of death which they had incurred by tasting the poison, passed upon them all this heavy sentence. He ordained that the serpent should hereafter creep upon its belly, and lick the dust; and in order that the spiritual destroyer, who animated it, might have no reason to rejoice in his success, he foretold that the injury done to man should be but as a wound on his least vulnerable part, the heel; while seed should arise from the woman who should mortally bruise the head of the serpent, and finally obtain the victory. He assured the woman that her sorrow in child-bearing should be exceedingly multiplied, and that she should be entirely subjected to the will of her husband, for whose sake the ground was to be accursed, and he was to eat of it in sorrow, all the days of his life. Paradise had brought forth every thing spontaneously, and his task had been hitherto his pleasure. Now nothing was to be produced without the greatest labour on his part; and to increase his misery, thorns and briars were to rise up,

and impede his work. God then ordered them to be turned out of the garden into a waste and barren country, and setting over the tree of life a guard of Cherubin, left them to mutual accusations, and unavailing regret.

The only consolation left them was that part of the sentence, which alluded to the future triumph of the seed of the woman over their designing enemy. That this promise was to be explained in a mystical sense was plain, for otherwise the threatening appears to be altogether unworthy both of the occasion and the Creator. It is further explained by the figurative language of Isaiah, who, describing the state of the church under the gospel, when the fulness of the Gentiles shall have come in, and the Jews shall have been restored, says, that "the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock, and dust shall be the serpent's meat." In which passage he evidently alludes to the final punishment of that being, who had seduced man into sin, and who is the origin of all the guilt and miseries of the world. We may also observe, that, as woman had been the first to eat, and

had persuaded Adam to do the same, the promised seed was to spring from her alone. A circumstance which was confirmed by the prophecy that "a virgin should conceive and bear a son;" by the declaration of the angel to Mary in the beginning of the gospel of St. Luke; and by the assertion of St. Paul in his epistle to the Galatians, that "when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son made of a woman." And the intent of the coming of this incorruptible seed was, that "through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;" that he might preach repentance unto life, hold up his "ensign to the nations from afar," and proclaim the mercies of redeeming love unto the ends of the earth.

That man might not harden his heart in unbelief, and imagine that the threatenings of God were of no effect, because they were delayed, a visible proof was soon given that he and his descendants should in their appointed time return to the earth from which he was taken. The execution of this sentence was also attended by circumstances, which shewed the extent of depravity to which he was become subject by his disobe-

dience. Adam had two sons, Cain the first-born, who was a tiller of the ground, and Abel, who was a keeper of sheep. These brothers offered at the same time an oblation unto the Lord, the one of the fruits of the ground, the other of the firstlings of his flock. God was pleased to give visible demonstration that he accepted the offering of Abel, but to that of Cain he had no respect. We are not told in what manner this acceptance and displeasure were manifested, but it is probable that the grateful sacrifice was devoured by fire from heaven, (the usual way in which God afterwards signified his acceptance to the patriarchs and prophets,) while the offering of the elder brother remained unconsumed. This distinction called up all the malignant passions in the soul of Cain, and his countenance bore strong marks of the discontent and envy which were seated at his heart. The Eternal still continued to hold communication with man notwithstanding his degraded state, and on this occasion he condescended to remonstrate with Cain on the impropriety of his conduct, and to point out to him the reason why his oblation had been rejected. It would appear that he had

not approached the altar with that humility and singleness of heart, which can alone make the actions of man well-pleasing to his Maker. He had brought an offering of the fruits of the ground, not so much out of gratitude and love, as to make an ostentatious display of the riches which he had extracted from the earth by the labour of his hands. He certainly looked upon this world as the end of being, for St. Paul informs us that he was deficient in that faith which enables us to bear the evils of life with fortitude, in the hope of an eternal reward. It was this diffidence in the justice of the Eternal, which caused him to resent the non-acceptance of his sacrifice, and gave him up a prey to gloom and discontent. It also caused him to disbelieve the assurance of his God, that if he reformed his heart, and humbled himself at the throne of grace, resolving thenceforward to lead a life in obedience to his declared will, and leaving the result to his good pleasure, in confidence of his justice, he should also be accepted as well as Abel, and be received to a participation of that everlasting inheritance, which was, through the merits and blood of the pro-

mised seed, to be the portion of all believers. Hence the divine remonstrance had no effect but to harden him in unbelief, and instigate him to vengeance. He took an opportunity when he and Abel were alone together in the field to fall upon him unawares, and to slay him. So little remorse did he feel after the execution of his purpose, that when the Lord enquired for his brother, he answered him with such insolence as no one would use to an equal, or even to an inferior for whom he entertained the slightest degree of respect. "I know not, replied he; am I my brother's keeper?" Why do you ask me for one, for whose conduct I am in no way responsible, and over whose actions I have no control? He had probably buried the murdered body, and thought that what was covered from human eyes, would be equally concealed from him who searcheth out the hidden things of darkness. God answered this insolent reply by charging him with the murder; and then proceeded to pronounce upon him so heavy a curse, that Cain declared his punishment to be more than the powers of humanity would enable him to bear. In consequence of Adam's disobe-

dience, the ground was to yield nothing necessary to human subsistence without hard labour and the sweat of his brow ; but the most intense application of this blood-stained man was hereafter to procure for him only a scanty subsistence ; and his troubled conscience was so continually to harass him with doubts and fears, both of present calamity, and of that future judgment which he had deemed a fable, that he should never remain long upon the same spot, but continue a fugitive and a vagabond to the end of his days. Moreover, a mark was set upon him, in order that whoever met him should know him ; and a decree passed, that if any one should kill him, vengeance should be taken sevenfold upon the murderer. Thus he was indeed freed from the danger of a violent death ; but to prolong such a life was only a prolongation of punishment, and holding up to that and future ages a more terrible and durable monument of the heinousness of a crime, which had called down upon its author so signal a judgment.

This short but lamentable tale contains some of the most important and useful lessons in the history of Scripture. It shews us

how deeply human nature was corrupted by the fall ; how naturally the unrestrained indulgence of the passions leads to the commission of crime ; and how necessary, both to our present and eternal happiness, is the union of faith and obedience.

All the motives which instigated the sin of our first parents appear to have been doubly entailed upon their posterity ; the two principal of which were distrust and pride. Distrust led Eve to doubt the benevolent intentions of her Maker ; pride induced her to break the commandment, in order to enlarge her sphere of knowledge, and raise herself in the scale of being. Distrust made Cain disbelieve the promise of a future reward, and doubt the divine assurance ; pride seduced him to arrogate the favour of God as a matter of right, and to look with an envious eye upon every mark of beneficence bestowed upon his brother. In the first instance they led to the only commission by which man could rebel ; in the latter they broke through all the boundaries by which sin is separated from crime, and let in upon the world that long train of guilt, which is continually swelling the account of human

depravity. So rapid was their progress, so universal became their influence, that in less than two thousand years they brought a flood of waters upon the earth ; and so generally have they established their dominion over the renovated world, that they threaten at no very distant period to call down the vengeance foretold by the Prophet, when the earth shall shrink like a shrivelled scroll, and the trump of the Arch-angel summon man to judgment. Against the terrors of that dreadful day the only efficient protection is purity of heart. The watch set over that treacherous inmate, whose "every imagination is evil continually," must never be withdrawn, for who can tell how quickly the first blameable indulgence may lead to actual sin, and sin to crime of the deepest stain ; till the seeds of virtue shall be entirely eradicated, and our access to the gate of life be closed upon us for ever. Distrust and pride having once taken possession of Cain, soon introduced their fit companions envy and wrath, and so completely did they share his soul as to instigate him to the perpetration of an act, whose lightest thought is revolting to humanity. Above all things

we must guard against the introduction of those dangerous delusions, that good works have of themselves alone an inherent claim to an immortal reward; or that God has predestined certain persons, without the performance of any condition on their part, to eternal salvation. St. Paul tells us, that want of faith occasioned the rejection of the elder brother's offering; and God has declared, that if Cain had continued in well-doing, he would have been accepted. Which apparent contradiction is easily reconciled by reflecting, that a genuine and efficacious faith includes the works of obedience; and that such good actions as obtain acceptance pre-suppose that humble confidence which sets no value upon its own performance, but looks for the fulfilment of the promises only through the merits and mediation of the Redeemer. So peculiar are the words used upon this occasion, that they appear to have been intended as a refutation of the opinion, that the grace of God is bestowed in consequence of election only. Cain, actuated by pride, considered himself in every respect superior to Abel, and would consequently attribute the dispensations of Providence to

undue preference and caprice. In this disposition he vents his unhallowed murmurs, and is corrected by being reminded that the fault is in his own heart, and comforted with the assurance that God is no respecter of persons, but receives with impartial justice all who worship him in spirit and in truth. He was free to pursue his course, or retrace his steps; to persist, or to repent. But the spirit of evil had engrossed him, and suggested such degrading thoughts of the divine government as maddened him to desperation. Hence that obstinate perseverance in crime, which ended in a brother's murder, and which doomed him to wander, a wretched outcast, a burden to himself, and the detestation of mankind.

In the premature death of Abel, we have evident proof that this life is not the end of being, and that worldly success and misfortune afford us no scale by which to judge of internal rectitude. Never would the Eternal have suffered him to have been cut off in the dawning of hope, when every virtue was budding into perfection, had he not prepared for him "a greater and more exceeding weight of glory." We are all apt

to be dazzled by the marks of temporal prosperity; and when the good are overtaken with affliction, or snatched from our mortal view, we lavish our tears, and are prodigal of our regrets. We do not consider that the wicked are suffered to flourish till the sum of his iniquities is full, and that the righteous are taken away from impending evil. Let us endeavour to penetrate the mists of this spiritual prison, and accustom ourselves to the contemplation of heavenly objects. Let us cultivate a humble opinion of ourselves; exalted notions of the Supreme; and, uniting faith with obedience, let us so live under the combined influences of resignation and hope that, in all the accidents to which human life is liable, we may maintain an even temper of mind; and welcome the last awful messenger as a long-expected friend, who comes to loosen our corruptible fetters, and bear us safe into the bosom of our Father and our God.

SERMON V.

JOHN IX. 4.

I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work.

THESE words were spoken by our blessed Saviour concerning himself; and, before I proceed to enforce their individual application, I wish to recal to your minds the very remarkable occasion on which they were uttered. Having dismissed the woman taken in adultery, and thus shewn that he assumed no authority as a temporal judge, he bore testimony to his heavenly mission before the assembled crowds, saying, "I am the light of the world, he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." To the truth of which declaration, the Pharisees objected, because he bare record of himself. The Evangelist proceeds to relate the preaching of Christ

upon that occasion, when many believed on him : and to the enquiries of the Jews respecting the nature of his mission, and the extent of his authority, he at last replied, " before Abraham was, I am." When Moses received his commission from God, who appeared to him in the flaming bush, he asked what answer he should give to those who should enquire after him that sent him. " Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, the God of your Fathers hath sent me unto you, and they shall say to me, what is his name? What shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I Am that I Am. And he said, thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I Am hath sent me unto you." When therefore our Lord declared " before Abraham was, I am," he assumed to himself the title, and the prerogative of God. As if he had said, " I am he, at whose breath the worlds were made ; who continue to sustain the fabric of the universe ; who conversed in dreams and visions with the Patriarchs ; who commissioned Moses to lead you out of the land of Egypt ; who went before you in a pillar of a cloud by day, and in a

pillar of fire by night ; the Rock of the wilderness, the Angel of the covenant, the Almighty, the everlasting God." No wonder, then, that those who expected to find in the Messiah a temporal King, of the seed of Abraham according to the flesh, should immediately proceed to execute judgment upon a man whom they considered guilty of blasphemy. " Then they took up stones to cast at him, but he hid himself, and went out of the midst of them, going through the temple, and so passed by." The time of his death being not yet come, he adopted the necessary human precautions, in order to escape their fury. But although he did not condescend to give a miraculous proof of his assertion to those who were so greatly enraged against him and hardened in unbelief, he embraced an immediate opportunity of strengthening and confirming the faith of those disciples who still walked with him, and who had probably been the mortal instruments of his rescue from this imminent danger. As they passed along, he " saw a man which was blind from his birth." His disciples, in reference to the second commandment, where God threatens

to "visit the sins of the fathers upon the children," enquired whether so great a misfortune had been entailed upon this person for the crime of his parents, or whether it was a punishment inflicted for any sins committed by his soul in some former state of existence. He replied, that the blindness of this man had been inflicted neither as a punishment nor a trial, but expressly in order that he, the Saviour of the Universe, might be enabled to give them indisputable evidence, that he came in the spirit, and in the power of God. To the Pharisees, who objected that his record was not true, because he bare record of himself, he had vouchsafed only a verbal assertion; "It is written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me." He now informs his disciples, that this man was born blind in order that God might give the necessary testimony, and bring irresistible proof that he, Jesus of Nazareth, was "the light of the world." For he prefaces the miracle with that very assertion which had called forth the objection; "as long as I am in the

world, I am the light of the world. When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle; and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said unto him, go, wash in the pool of Siloam. He went his way, therefore, and washed, and came seeing." In this instance, then, the Father and the Son bare record together; and I know no part of Scripture which more decidedly proves that Christ was not merely a prophet, nor even an angel who had assumed the human form for the redemption of mankind, but really what we declare him to be in the Nicene Creed,—“Light of light, very God of very God.” He first tells the people, in the words of Jehovah from the flaming bush, that he is God; he then asserts, that a man, who sat begging by the way-side, was born blind, in order that the Godhead might manifest itself in the cure of his infirmity; and he actually performs the miracle to which he had appealed for the confirmation of his Divinity. A miracle of no ordinary kind; a miracle, which it was impossible for human ingenuity to disprove, or human malice to misinterpret. To have cured a complaint

produced by natural causes, might have been imputed to superior skill in surgery or medicine. To restore the sight of one generally and notoriously known to have been blind from his birth, upon whom probably every expedient had been tried, and had failed; to do this, without any previous preparation, before a cloud of witnesses, simply by mixing his spittle with a little common clay, admitted neither equivocation nor misconception. Those who persist in denying the Divinity of our blessed Lord, may say, that being endowed from above with the gift of prophecy, and the power of working miracles, he, in this instance, exceeded his commission for the gratification of his pride, thereby claiming a higher state of being than that to which he was justly entitled. In refutation of this objection, let me refer you to several instances in the Old Testament, where the presumption or disobedience of a prophet was attended with visible and immediate punishment. When Balaam attempted to go to Balak without authority, the angel of the Lord met him in the way, and would have slain him. The prophet, who was sent to curse the altar at

Bethel, was destroyed by a lion, for having returned and eaten bread and drunk water in a city, in which the Lord had commanded him neither to eat nor to drink. It is also recorded in the twentieth chapter of the First Book of Kings, that one of the sons of the prophets, who refused to smite his neighbour on the cheek when invoked in the name of the Lord, suffered death for his disobedience. But Moses, the great forerunner and type of Christ, affords a precedent more strictly applicable to our present purpose. When the children of Israel were on the point of perishing for want of water, "the glory of the Lord appeared, and the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth its water, and thou shalt bring forth to them its water out of the rock; so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. And Moses took the rod from before the Lord as he commanded them. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them,

hear now, ye rebels, must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lift up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice; and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also." Moses was desired to stand and speak to the rock with the rod in his hand, in order that the children of Israel might know that the miracle proceeded from the Word of the Lord, who alone giveth "help in time of trouble." But momentary irritation and pride prevailed over the prudence and meekness of the Prophet. He smote the rock twice, and both by word and action endeavoured to convey to the minds of the people, that he had done this great thing of his own power and authority. "Hear now, ye rebels," said he, "must *we* bring you water out of this rock?" This act of disobedience, presumption, and unbelief, was immediately followed by the denunciation of the heaviest punishment which could be inflicted upon Moses and Aaron in this life—their exclusion from the land of promise. "And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of

Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them." Moses prayed fervently, that he might still be allowed to cross the river Jordan; but could only obtain permission to behold the land of Canaan from the top of Mount Pisgah. The sentence which he had incurred, was punctually inflicted. We are informed in the last chapter of Deuteronomy, which is supposed to have been added by his successor Joshua, that "he died in the land of Moab, according to the Word of the Lord." If the presumption of Moses was thus severely punished, is it credible that the Almighty would suffer his favoured servant to work a miracle in confirmation of blasphemy, while employed in a mission which concerned the eternal welfare of mankind? If, therefore, we believe that prophecy and the power of working miracles are the gift of the Eternal, we must also believe that in his "holy child Jesus dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," and continue to address him in the fervent ejaculation of the convicted Thomas, "my Lord, and my God!"

But immediately previous to working this

miraculous cure in confirmation of his divinity, our benevolent Redeemer used an expression which shewed most strongly the genuine humility of his spirit, and at the same time impressed upon the minds of his disciples the necessity of instant and unremitting exertion. "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work." I am about to prove incontestably that I partake of the Divine Essence, and, for the confirmation of your faith, and that of succeeding generations, exercise its power. Having however taken upon me the form of man, and the likeness of a servant, I have to fulfil the task appointed me of the Father, and must leave you an example of perfect obedience. Nor will this work admit delay. The time for its accomplishment is limited; and, as the setting sun puts an end to the labours of the husbandman, so is that night rapidly approaching, which shall put a period to my labours in this state of mortality. Be ye also diligent in your calling, and cultivate, while day continues, the vineyard which I shall have planted.

Let us now dedicate a few moments to

the consideration of the person by whom the Messiah was sent; the work which he was commissioned to execute; the shortness of the time allowed for its fulfilment; and the circumstances and consequences of that night which closed the glorious scene, and terminated the sufferings of the Saviour of mankind.

The person, who in the language of Scripture is said to have sent our Saviour to fulfil his sacred mission, is the first person of the Trinity, the Father of the universe. Upon the fall of man from his high estate in Paradise, the Almighty Son consecrated himself as a sacrifice for our redemption. The decrees of heaven are not to be reversed. When he offered to make this oblation for sin, he willingly resigned for a season the celestial throne. Clothed with this tabernacle of flesh, he became "inferior to the Father as touching his manhood" until his glorified resurrection, when all things both in heaven and earth were "put under his feet." During his sojourn on earth, he assumed a lower station as far as regarded his personal trials and sufferings; and although he "thought it no robbery to be

equal with God," yet he constantly magnified the will of the Father; and in his agony in the garden he ardently prayed that, if it were possible, that cup of sorrow might "pass from him." So desirous was he to keep this fact in the view of his disciples, that he constantly attributes to the Father every extraordinary work. He cast out devils by "the finger of God." When his enemies attempted to seize him, and Peter drew his sword to defend him, he says, "Thinkest thou not that I can pray to my Father, and he will instantly give me twelve legions of Angels? But then how should these things be?" He might certainly have quitted at pleasure this state of trial, and have resumed his station on high, as far as power was concerned; but having devoted himself for man, he lay under a moral impossibility of renouncing his engagement. God cannot lie; his word is truth. Subsequently then to his voluntary offer of atonement, he was literally sent of the Father, and his work was "to do the will of him that sent him."

That will, how full of benevolence and love! That work how extensive, how glo-

rious! To establish a new covenant between God and man; to deliver a code of morals, perfect as the being from whom it had its source; to illustrate every precept by spotless example; to preach good tidings of great joy, either in person, or by messengers endowed with extraordinary powers throughout the cities of Judah; to fulfil in their order all the predictions of the prophets concerning the Messiah, the Almighty Deliverer from the bondage of sin and death; to give publicly, at various times, before different assemblies, miraculous proofs of the truth of his divine mission; for the sake of weak corrupted man, to receive buffetings and ignominy as the vilest of malefactors; to bear the sins of the whole world on his body on the tree; and, in the last agonies of expiring humanity, to illustrate the hardest lesson which he had taught, by earnestly praying that his murderers might be forgiven, that they might believe and repent, and be hereafter admitted to share with him a crown of immortality. Such was the labour of love required at his hands, including every trial both of suffering and active obedience. With what precision,

with what unceasing anxiety he strove to perform it, let the sacred volume bear witness ; whose every page abounds with sublime precepts, with proofs of the most touching solicitude for the present and eternal happiness of the meanest of mankind, and with acts of more than parental kindness. When the mind's eye embodies the affecting scenes drawn by the Evangelists, you would imagine that you beheld him surrounded by his kindred, paying peculiar attentions to the lame, the deaf, and the blind, as to a beloved child or brother endeared by infirmity, and drawn still closer to his heart by the injuries of the world. Can the human mind, we are inclined to exclaim, be capable of such disinterested, such unbounded benevolence? Alas ! my brethren, the powers of man fall as much below the ability thus to act, as the Majesty of the Godhead exceeds the expectation that he would undertake it. Is it not then infinitely more wonderful that He, whose blessedness is incapable of diminution or of change, should submit to the extremes of poverty and hunger,, to bodily pain, and mental affliction, in order to reclaim ungrate-

ful rebels to his will, whom his word might annihilate in a moment, and who can add nothing to his felicity? Yet this is the mystery of the faith delivered to the saints, which we cannot comprehend; but which we are required to believe as the condition of our salvation. We know it to be true, because he, who is truth itself, has asserted it; and confirmed that assertion by such a miracle as could only be performed by the interposition of God. And whether or no our confidence in "his faithfulness and truth" be sufficiently strong to work in us the necessary works of obedience, we shall most assuredly behold him face to face when he shall come "in the glory of his Father, attended by the blessed angels," to call into judgment every action, whether it be good, or whether it be evil; and to pass irrevocable sentence upon the gainsayer and the believer, upon "him that serveth God, and upon him that serveth him not."

Let me now ask you what portion of time you should think sufficient for these works of mercy? The years of man are three-score and ten; and when the best of us turn from the brink of the grave to recal with

scrupulous exactness every act which can administer comfort to the departing spirit, how few are those from which we can derive any real consolation, which have not been debased by a mixture of pride, interest, or vain-glory? Yet all the works, which the Omnipotent deemed necessary to accomplish the end of the divine mission, were to be performed in less than four years! Justly might the Saviour of the world declare, that he "must work the works of him that sent him, while it was day;" that he had no time left for indolent repose, or pleasurable enjoyment; that he must not suffer even the requisite precautions of personal safety to distract him from his destined labours; but that he must pursue the unvaried tenor of his course, while the beams of the sun lighted him on his journey, lest, if he lingered by the way, the shades of night should close on him for ever. He foreknew who should betray him; the time, the place, the manner of his death; and he delayed not to execute the commands of his Father, but hastened to do every thing which was connected with, or could contribute to the divine scheme for the redemption of man-

kind. He compared the appointed time of his ministry to a natural day ; a day, whose fellow was never to return. " The Sun of Righteousness had arisen with healing in his wings," and all nations were called " to his light, and kings to the brightness of his rising." He was to penetrate the mists of ignorance and error ; to dissipate the cloud which hung between the camps of Israel and Egypt, between the chosen seed and the rebellious Gentiles ; " to give light to them that sat in darkness and in the shadow of death ;" and to renovate with his sacred beams all the corners of the earth. The benefits of his coming were to be general and unconfined ; and, when he set, he was to rise no more. How true, how just an emblem of the " Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," pure, and without spot, " unspeakable, and full of glory." Of Him, who gave himself a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, and having made " one oblation of himself once offered, for ever sat down at the right hand of God, from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool." There is now no other sin-offering but the blood of Jesus.

He will come no more to direct us by his precepts, to convince us by his miracles, to strengthen us by his example. He executed, during the short period of his ministry, so many acts of charity and mercy, that if I should speak of them, they are more in number than I should be able to express. He continued to labour "while it was day," with unremitted diligence, with unwearied love; and, at his departure, he left us so clear a revelation, so sure a Testament sealed with his blood; and consummated, in his last moments, so inestimable a triumph over the eternal enemy of man, that he may be said to have turned the night into a softer day; and, like the luminary to which he was compared by the prophet, to have eclipsed his noontide splendor by his decline of glory.

At that awful hour, he finished a life of sufferings beyond all which had fallen to the lot of man, and completed the redemption of the whole human race. The night which succeeded, was indeed a night of horror to those who had crucified the Lord of life; for it was attended by supernatural darkness, and spoke in thunders to the heart of

the guilty. But to the faithful disciple, to the truly humble and confiding Christian, every circumstance which attended the dissolution of his Master, was an additional proof of his "faithfulness and truth." "The earth quaked, and the rocks rent." All nature was convulsed at the expiation of her God. "The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom:" and while the hardened and unbelieving Jew trembled at an event of more than mortal import, it conveyed to the anxious disciple the assurance of reconciliation; and gave to every believer free access into the courts of the Eternal. The Saviour of the world had concluded his work. The labour of the Christian was about to commence. The signal was given from above, and the angels of the everlasting gospel were sent forth to gather the elect from the four winds of heaven. Armed with the promises and threatenings of the new covenant, and with authority to declare remission of sins to all who should believe and repent, they were commanded to preach Christ crucified in every country, and by the washing of regeneration to receive his disciples into the

adoption of the spirit. A commission of the greatest importance, of the heaviest responsibility! No plea of worldly engagements, of want of leisure, nor even of mental incapacity, will excuse the neglect of it. The ministers of the church have undertaken it at the altar; they have sworn to be zealous and diligent in their sacred calling; and the soul of every one who goes astray through their inattention, will be required at their hands. Consider then, my brethren, how grievous a thing it is to call continually, and to have no reply; to sow the seeds of eternal life, and to have no return in due season. To be bound to the constant repetition of a duty, which as constantly fails of its effect; to be for ever explaining doctrines, and giving utterance to divine truths, which attract the attention for a moment, but never sink into the heart. Your will, your habits of life, your earnest investigation of sacred things, must co-operate with the exertions of your pastors, if you really wish their exhortations to be useful either to you or to themselves. They are promised a more excellent reward according to the success of their labours, for "they that turn many to

righteousness, shall shine as the firmament for ever ;” but if their flocks be incorrigibly negligent, or obstinately deaf, the crime is their own, their own will be the punishment. Suffer not yourselves to be deceived by reports, so assiduously circulated, that the ministers of the Church of England are incapable of explaining to you the gospel of peace. Listen at least to their discourses, and diligently enquire into the truth of these things. Try their doctrines by the only infallible test, the sure word of Scripture. To have given credit too easily to the assertions of the abandoned and profligate, or to have been led away by cunningly devised fables, however correct the moral conduct of those who countenance them, will be of no avail in the great day of retribution. Should all their flocks combine to cast a stigma upon their doctrines in the hope of having themselves excused, there is one who judgeth, even the all-righteous God ; who will not refuse his servants their proper recompense, although they should be obliged to declare in the words of their Heavenly Father, “all day long have I stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.”

SERMON VI.

HEBREWS X. 39.

We are not of them that draw back to perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

IN the holy Gospels we have the history of our Saviour's life and doctrines; and in the Epistles we have such further directions as are necessary to regulate our faith, and keep us in the way which leads to eternal happiness. The plain and simple narrative given in the four Evangelists may easily be understood by all who will read it with attention, and who are desirous of information on that most important subject. The precepts and parables are, in many instances, clothed in the figurative language of the East, and some acquaintance with the manners and customs of the nations of antiquity is necessary for their proper explanation. But the Epistles abound with difficulties of expression, and with allusions to opinions

and events, with the nature and circumstances of which those to whom these letters are addressed were perfectly acquainted, but which to us are mysterious and obscure. These difficulties are the chief causes of the different sects among Christians; and some of them have produced scruples of conscience in a vast number of persons, who, therefore, hesitate to observe those sacraments which were instituted by our Lord himself, and which are generally necessary to salvation. To explain such difficult passages, and to endeavour to overcome such scruples as may have been raised by misinterpretation or misconception, is the peculiar province of the Christian minister; and as there is no part of the service of the Church of England so generally neglected as the administration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, it becomes the more imperiously his duty to warn his flock of the flagrant contempt of which they are guilty, and of the dreadful punishment which they incur, by persisting in such neglect. Of all the offences committed by those who had embraced the doctrines of Christianity in the primitive ages of the church, there is only one

declared to be incapable of pardon ; and this was that sin of apostacy against which the apostle so seriously warns the Jewish converts in the Epistle to the Hebrews ; and which, from the earnestness and frequency of his exhortations to avoid it, appears to have been at that time very generally committed. To such indeed as dissembled their faith in time of danger, and from dread of persecution, the door of repentance was still open ; and although their sin was great, and afforded evident proof of a weak and wavering faith, yet upon a full conviction of their fault, and a firm belief of the efficacy of Christ's atonement upon the cross, they were again received into the bosom of the Church. None indeed were excluded from the hope of salvation, but such as having duly considered the signs of the times, and become acquainted with the truths of Christianity, had, of their own free will, renounced the faith which was in them, and again embraced the worship of heathen images, or the ceremonies of the Jewish law. For these men have had a full experience of all the means by which God was pleased to give testimony to the truth of the

Christian faith, and of the prophetic office, and glorious resurrection of our Lord; and if they refuse to be convinced, there is no other method left to change their unbelief. But frequent as this apostacy was at the period in which St. Paul wrote; it was still more general perhaps a few years since, when almost every nation of Europe embraced the cause of infidelity. The delusion is past; the madness, when we consider its once powerful and extensive influence, may be said to be no more; but it has left behind it, as its natural consequence, that hesitation and doubt, which stop suddenly short with one foot upon the threshold, and refuse to enter the sanctuary of God. Such a temper of mind argues the extreme of danger; it speaks in language not to be mistaken; it bears audible testimony to the want of that enthusiastic love, which has tried in vain to measure the extent of a Redeemer's sacrifice, and comes with humble gratitude to offer its tribute of adoration and praise. Yet that such a temper is common amongst you, my beloved brethren, I am compelled to declare; and for the truth of my assertion to that altar I appeal! That altar,

which you are continually exhorted to approach, where you are invited to enter into communion with your Heavenly Master ; and to which he beckons you himself with smiles of beneficence and love. Is it the lukewarmness of your faith which disobeys the summons ? Or is it that mysterious terror which fears to tempt a heavier condemnation, and trembles for the consequences of an ill-spent life ? I believe that it is too frequently a mixture of both, and I would seriously argue with you upon the effects which they are likely to produce. Were I addressing an assembly who had never heard the glad tidings of salvation, I must begin by rehearsing the narrative of the gospel ; but the very circumstance of your attendance here, tells me that you are acquainted with the leading doctrines of Christianity ; that you are desirous of having your doubts removed ; and that you bring a willing mind, prepared to divest itself of prejudice, and eager for conviction. I shall endeavour to shew you that those who think an inactive assent to the truths of Christianity sufficient to salvation, deceive themselves ; that in religion there is no middle course ;

and that those who are lukewarm in their faith, are ready every moment to retrace their steps and relapse into thicker darkness than enveloped them before they embraced, upon conviction, the doctrines of Jesus. And should I be so happy as to bring you to a sense of your situation, I trust that conviction will be followed by immediate amendment; that you will, on the approaching nativity of our blessed Lord, crowd around his altar, to partake in the commemoration of his sufferings and death; and that we may all have the satisfaction to declare with the apostle, "We are not of them that draw back to perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."

In the first place, I would address myself to those, who are constant attendants upon the service of the church, who listen with attention to the doctrines which they hear there, and who depart with a general determination to obey the precepts of the gospel. Such persons perhaps partly put in practice what they are taught; they are charitable and kind to their poorer and more helpless neighbours, and sometimes give themselves

up to serious meditation upon the subject of religion.

After having been present at a strong exhortation to partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, they may reason within themselves somewhat after this manner.—“ I feel a powerful impression upon my mind of the truth of Christianity; I desire to be more fully informed of every circumstance connected with its rise and progress, and to be acquainted with every step necessary to ensure my eternal welfare. For this purpose, I regularly attend the duty of the church, and I feel satisfied from the proofs which are there given me, that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah promised to the Jews; who suffered death upon the cross for the sins of all mankind, and who shall come again at the ‘ end of the world in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead.’ I have for some time been contented with such a belief, and considered myself certain of eternal happiness, whenever it shall please God to call me from this life to a better world. But I begin now to feel my mind harrassed and uneasy; and to doubt whether something further be not necessary to insure my

eternal salvation. If Jesus was indeed the Messiah, and died for me and for all mankind, he instituted on the very night in which he was betrayed, a certain sacrament in perpetual commemoration of his death, and accompanied it with this particular and express command to his disciples, 'as often as ye eat and drink, do this in remembrance of me.' He also declared that the bread to be broken on that solemn occasion was to be a type of his body offered as a sacrifice upon the cross, and that the wine was to be a type of his blood, which was shed for many, for the remission of sins. I find too that the Apostle St. Paul, who was raised up purposely to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, exhorts the Corinthians to the exact observance of this commemoration in the most impressive manner, and that it was very generally observed in the first ages of the Church. I am therefore almost persuaded that to receive it at stated times is the duty of every Christian, and that it cannot be neglected without incurring a heavy responsibility. I do not indeed find myself sufficiently prepared at present for that purpose, but I determine to take it into my most

serious consideration, and when the next regular season returns, if no fresh doubts and difficulties arise in my mind, I intend to assist at its celebration."

The man, who argues thus upon such an occasion, retires perfectly satisfied with the goodness of his intentions, and thinks very little more upon the subject till he is surprised with a fresh exhortation to the performance of his duty, when he repeats the same arguments, with the same unfortunate result. Alas! my brethren, a very little more consideration upon the subject of religion, and a little stronger and more determined resolution to examine the state of his soul, would bring such a man with pious gratitude and faith, to the table of his Redeemer. It is this continual delay to which we are all too prone; it is this unwillingness to listen to unpleasant truths, when they concern ourselves, which carry us on day after day, and year after year, in the same temper of indecision, till disease and death overtake us; and, if we are still permitted to partake in the most awful of the ceremonies of religion, we embrace the opportunity more from terror than from hope; and the

celebration is productive only of dissatisfied feelings, which would gladly impose upon the world, but are unable to deceive even ourselves. Let me exhort all those who find themselves in this situation no longer to hesitate; they have ample time for enquiry and for prayer; time which, if properly employed, will make them acquainted with the urgent necessity of their case, and prepare their minds for reconciliation with that Heavenly Parent, who feels for all his children a much stronger affection than any earthly parent, and who most earnestly desires that we should all experience the influence of his Holy Spirit, and be brought through faith by repentance to salvation.

Let me now call your attention to a passage in St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, which is said to have deterred many well-disposed persons from attending the Lord's Supper, and which certainly has served as an excuse to numbers, who never perhaps had any serious desire to communicate. The passage to which I allude is in the eleventh chapter, and thus expressed; "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily,

shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." That such a sentence, standing by itself, should have the effect of terrifying weak minds, I can easily believe; but when we examine what immediately precedes, and consider the occasion upon which it was written, the matter becomes plain and intelligible, and doubt and uncertainty are at an end. The supper of our Lord was originally celebrated in this manner. Every person carried into the church as much meat and drink as he chose, or could afford; and when the whole congregation were assembled they first commemorated the death of Christ by the sacrament of bread and wine, and afterwards sat down and partook together of the supper which all had provided. So that the rich had the opportunity afforded them of concluding the ceremony with an act of charity, and of furnishing a cheerful and comfortable meal to their poorer neighbours. But the Corinthians had

greatly abused this custom. It appears that many individuals had brought large quantities of wine to the feast; that they had begun the celebration before the whole congregation were assembled; that they had invited no one to partake with them; and that the poor were left without provision, while the rich committed a debauch. "For in eating," says the Apostle, "every one taketh before other his own supper; and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What, have ye not houses to eat and to drink in, or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not?" And he proceeds to shew them with how much simplicity and decency Christ had celebrated the supper with the disciples; assuring them that those who partook of it in so unworthy a manner as he had before described, were guilty of the body and blood of the Lord; for they did indeed crucify him afresh, and put him to an open shame. So that there is no foundation for the scruples of those who have been terrified by the Apostle's declaration. At the same time it is certainly true, that whoever comes to share those holy mysteries, must examine his own heart, and

not presume to approach that table, unless he be in Christian charity with all men. And if we indeed live in the practice of the Christian virtues, and have a lively faith in the sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross, why should we hesitate to accept his gracious invitation? To say that we are not prepared, is to declare that we harbour malice and hatred in our hearts; and to what purpose are the outward forms of Christianity unless we practise its precepts? To what purpose is it that we attend the service of this sacred place, unless we come with minds prepared to profit by what we hear? If, my beloved brethren, we really possess such minds, and are constant in our attendance here, we must already have made great progress in forming the Christian character, and are inexcusable if we refuse the high bidding of our God. For we are no longer aliens to his government, or strangers to his presence; we have freely entered into his service, and are summoned to share the inheritance with the children of his love. To us the sacred talent is entrusted, during the absence of our Sovereign in a distant land; and if we suffer it to rust in inactivity, we

shall, upon his return, be assuredly committed to the stern ministers of his vengeance, while our more worthy and active brethren are admitted to the full enjoyment of his favour, and a participation of his unbounded happiness and power. To us are addressed the same precious promises which were rejected by the Jews. We have the same advantage of searching the Scriptures of the Old Testament which they possessed; we do not indeed behold Christ preaching to us the doctrines which he sealed with his blood, nor do we listen to the fervent and simple eloquence of his Apostles, who were partakers of his sufferings, and eye-witnesses of his death; but we have their written testimony enforced by the commentary of ages; and, above all things, we have the prophecies, delivered both by him and them, fulfilled in their regular order, and still daily fulfilling before our eyes; so plain and evident, that no one can doubt the justice of their application; and appealing so home to the bosom and feelings of every man, that he who refuses to hear, must be wilfully deaf; he who refuses to profit by them, must be obstinately wicked. Whence then, let me ask,

whence proceeds this culpable negligence to the duties of religion, and more especially this frequent absenting yourselves from the public services of the church? Is it because the ceremony of baptism and the bearing the name of Christian is considered as a sufficient badge of your faith; and an external profession of belief a sufficient passport to salvation? Or is it because you are convinced that the whole course and tenor of your lives is in such direct contradiction to all the precepts of the gospel, that you fear to hear the language of reproach, and, therefore, shut your ears to the words of eternal life? Or are you so wholly occupied with the business of the world, that you must put off the day of repentance to a more convenient opportunity? Alas! my friends, the hour is coming when none of these excuses will be of any avail; the hour when not one of you will dare to prefer them. He who is baptized, is baptized to the faith of Christ, and enlists himself as his soldier; those who answer for him are deeply responsible for his moral and religious instruction; but when he comes of age to take his vows upon him-

self, personal and active service is required. He is bound to seize every opportunity of improving himself in the knowledge of the Scriptures, to set a good example to others by the strictness of his conduct, by the regularity of his attendance upon the usual public worship, and by openly shewing that he believes upon conviction that which he professes ; and that he is not ashamed to confess Christ crucified, and to obey his precepts, in spite of the sneers of the unbelieving, and the clamours of the thoughtless and the profligate. “Not every one that sayeth unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” It is, indeed, by faith alone that we are saved through the merits of Christ Jesus ; but good works are the natural and necessary proofs of a faith which is deep-rooted and genuine. Whoever really believes that the Son of God came into the world and took our nature upon him, and was nailed to the tree, and washed out with his precious blood the sins of all who believe on him ; whoever really believes this, will be so deeply impressed with the importance of that atoning

sacrifice, that he will humble himself in the dust before the Father of mercies, and in-treat the grace of his Holy Spirit, to assist him in searching out his will, and to enable him to perform it. He will reflect upon the sufferings which a Saviour underwent, in order to save his soul from everlasting destruction. He will recollect the mild exhortations of that Saviour, his gentle yet earnest reproofs; he will think upon the scorn and buffetings which he encountered; his agony in the garden, the anguish of his soul while he hung bleeding upon the cross; and he will earnestly and devoutly consecrate his zeal and his talents to the service of him, who suffered more in his own person than ever man suffered, but "whose yoke," in compassion to our infirmities, was made "easy, and his burden light."

It remains for me to address those who, having long neglected all the services of the Church, pretend that they are too busy at present to give a proper attention to the divine invitation, and who say, as Festus did to Paul, "go thy way for this time; when I have a more convenient season I will send for thee." They have

perhaps some scheme in hand for the increase of their fortune, or wish to amass a certain sum of money in order to accomplish a favorite project. When they shall have attained their wish, will they really sit down seriously to investigate their spiritual affairs, and to inquire into the state of their souls? Do not believe it: Some new project will succeed; good fortune in the first instance will make the next object less difficult of attainment, and more grateful in the pursuit; all the faculties will be again engrossed; the pleadings of conscience, having once been hushed, will be more easily silenced by the same excuse; and the only convenient season will be the last death-bed scene, when the priest will be sent for in haste to administer the sacred elements; and he who has lived all his life without God in the world will, if permitted, have recourse to his most sacred institution, as a last desperate expedient, and think it a sufficient passport from Time to Eternity.

In such a scene may you never be actors!
 To such a scene may I never be a witness!
 To refuse such an one what he might possibly consider as the only means of reconciliation with an offended God, might heighten

the bitterness of his soul ; but to administer that sacred rite to one who had never seriously considered its importance ; who is ignorant perhaps of its meaning, and the reason of its institution ; who is a member of the Church merely because his family were so before him, and who is a Christian only in name ; would be to violate the sanctity of the altar, and to deceive an immortal soul on the confines of the grave. Of a death-bed repentance God alone is the Judge ; and I tremble to think how frequently the professions of the sinner in those awful moments are the unmeaning effects of terror. Righteousness is not the work of immediate inspiration, nor can any man have a true and lively faith, by whom the grounds of it have never been examined. “ Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.” An acquaintance with the divine truths of the gospel is the fruit of constant and unwearied assiduity ; and he who comes once a month to join in the public prayers, and to hear a sermon, must not complain of the minister if he be uninstructed in points of doctrine ; nor expect that the little which he can learn from a single discourse will be a

sufficient protection against the multiplied temptations which assail him. By a regular attendance here he will learn, in course of time, whatever is most important in the history of the Bible. He will receive, I trust, instruction from the pulpit upon many points difficult to be understood; and, if he has any remaining doubts, private explanation will be given cheerfully and eagerly to all who desire it. I intreat you to take these things into your serious consideration; to think of them, as you may never have thought of them at any former period. And may God further your good intentions by the grace of his Holy Spirit, and finally bring you as humble and contrite suppliants to share the bounties of his table in communion with your Redeemer.

In order to give effect to this my fervent wish and prayer, I am anxious to strengthen my argument with the opinions of those, whose sanctity and learning may operate upon your minds with irresistible authority. The Book of Common Prayer contains two exhortations to the due observance of the Lord's Supper, both of which were drawn up with great care and circumspection by the

fathers of the English Church. To the latter, which is now seldom read, I am desirous of attracting your notice; and, in order to fix your attention, I shall conclude by reciting it.

“ I bid you all that are here present, my dearly beloved brethren, to the Lord's Supper, and beseech you, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, that ye will not refuse to come thereto, being so lovingly called and bidden by God himself. Ye know how grievous and unkind a thing it is, when a man hath proposed a rich feast, decked his table with all kind of provision, so that there lacketh nothing but the guests to sit down; and yet they who are called (without any cause) most unthankfully refuse to come. Which of you, in such a case, would not be moved? Who would not think a great injury and wrong done unto him? Wherefore, most dearly beloved in Christ, take ye good heed, lest ye withdrawing yourselves from this holy supper, provoke God's indignation against you. It is an easy matter for a man to say, I will not communicate, because I am otherwise hindered with worldly business. But such excuses are not

so easily accepted, and allowed before God. If any man say, I am a grievous sinner, and therefore am afraid to come; wherefore then do ye not repent and amend? When God calleth you, are ye not ashamed to say, ye will not come? When ye should return to God, will ye excuse yourselves, and say ye are not ready? Consider earnestly with yourselves how little such feigned excuses will avail before God. They that refused the feast in the gospel, because they had bought a farm, and would try their yokes of oxen, or because they were married, were not so excused, but counted unworthy of the heavenly feast. I, for my part, shall be ready; and according to mine office, I bid you, in the name of God, I call you in Christ's behalf, I exhort you as ye love your own salvation, that ye will be partakers of this holy communion. And as the Son of God did vouchsafe to yield up his soul by death upon the cross for your salvation; so it is your duty to receive the communion in remembrance of the sacrifice of his death, as he himself hath commanded; which if ye shall neglect to do, consider with yourselves how great injury ye do to

God, and how sore punishment hangeth over your heads for the same ; when you willfully abstain from the Lord's table, and separate from your brethren, who come to feed on the banquet of that most heavenly food. These things, if ye earnestly consider, ye will, by God's grace, return to a better mind ; for the obtaining whereof we shall not cease to make our humble petitions unto Almighty God our heavenly Father."

SERMON VII.

LUKE ii. 10, 11.

Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For to you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

DURING the reign of Augustus Cæsar, when Judea was little better than a province of the Roman empire, all nations subject to his dominion were summoned to be taxed and enrolled in their respective cities. Those Jews who were of the tribe and lineage of David, went up to Bethlehem; and amongst the rest was Joseph with Mary, his espoused wife, being at that time "great with child." Bethlehem was so crowded with strangers, who came to be taxed, that Joseph and Mary were compelled to take up their abode in the stable, notwithstanding the situation of the latter required the utmost tenderness and care. She was there safely delivered of a male child, whom she wrapt

in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger. A birth, attended with such circumstances of meanness, seemed to announce no extraordinary visitant ; but it was also accompanied by other manifestations, which formed a strong contrast to the poverty of his parents, and the humility of his entrance into the world. A company of shepherds were keeping watch over their flocks by night, in the fields near the city, when suddenly the same brightness which usually surrounded the ark of the covenant, when God held visible communication with the high priest, shone round about them, and filled earth and heaven with supernatural splendour. The shepherds were terrified at so awful and unexpected an appearance, when an Angel explained to them the meaning of the heavenly vision. " Fear not, said he ; for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people : for to you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." The glory which formerly led Israel in a pillar of fire from the pursuit of the Egyptians, and which ever announce the spiritual presence of the Most High in the Temple,

now accompanies the coming of your God in human shape ; of that eternal Saviour, who was promised to the Patriarchs, and foretold by the Prophets ; and whose ministry shall be the means of happiness to all nations of the earth. As soon as the Angel had made this declaration, a company of the heavenly host appeared, praising their Great Creator, and glorifying him for the birth of a child, who was eventually to bring peace upon earth, and be the instrument of the good-will of God to man. The shepherds having been thus warned went in search of the Infant, whose humble abode the Angel had pointed out to them ; and the relation of these events, being generally circulated, confirmed the faith and animated the hopes of those, who looked for the coming of the promised seed at that particular period, and patiently waited for redemption in Israel.

There are three particulars in this annunciation, which merit our attention, and which will lead us to the consideration of those joyful tidings, which we are this day assembled to celebrate. They are the place in which the Child was born, the city of

David ; and the titles which are given him of Christ, or the Anointed One ; and of Lord, or Sovereign of the Universe.

The prophet Micah, speaking of the birth of the promised seed, says, “ but thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me, that is to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting.”

As the parents of Jesus resided in Galilee, nothing could be more unlikely than that he should be born in the place here mentioned by the prophet ; which was at a very considerable distance from Nazareth, and which the difficulty of travelling, and the poverty of Joseph, would in all probability prevent them from visiting. The decree of the Roman emperor, therefore, appears to have been issued providentially at this peculiar moment, compelling all the lineage of David to go and be taxed at the very Bethlehem, (for there was another city of that name, near their own residence in Galilee,) the Bethlehem Ephratah so expressly foretold. Moreover, had the event taken place in consequence of any accident other than

this general taxation, it would not have been publicly recorded that both Joseph and Mary were of the tribe of David, nor would any enrolment have taken place. The genealogy of Joseph is given in two of the Evangelists, that of Mary is omitted. But had she been of any other lineage, she would have gone to be taxed at the city of her peculiar tribe, and not have accompanied her husband in consequence of their espousals. This fact, agreeing with the well-known custom of the Jews, is a complete answer to the objection, that Christ does not appear from the gospel to have been descended from David by his mother's side, but only on that of his supposed Father. The child therefore announced by the angel was not only brought into the world in the very spot appointed for the birth of the expected Messiah, but was actually of the seed of the kings of Judah according to the flesh, and literally accomplished the prediction contained in the hundred and thirty-second Psalm—"The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David, he will not turn from it; of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne."

In this child then were fulfilled, as we have seen, the preliminary steps which were to distinguish the Christ, or the Anointed One. Let us now enquire with what peculiar character and office the Immortal Herald intended to invest the Infant whom he distinguished by this title. It was customary with the Jews to anoint, by pouring oil on their heads, those who were destined to the regal or priestly office; and this was frequently done at the express command of God. Hence the future Messiah, who was to restore the sceptre to Judah, and fill the sacred offices of priest and prophet, is in scripture termed the Anointed of the Lord.

To apply then to any one the name of Christ was to declare, that he was destined to perform all which had been foretold of the long-looked for Saviour, who was to free mankind from the yoke of bondage, and lead the nations from darkness to light, from sin and misery to purity and happiness, As prophet he was to possess all knowledge past, present, and to come; as priest, he was to offer up the last oblation, of which all former sacrifices were only types, and to make one full and sufficient expiation for the

sins of the whole world; and as king, he was to sit upon the throne of David, exercising supreme power on earth; abolishing the ceremonial law, and establishing that perfect rule of life, which prepares us for a more exalted state of being, and alone induces the peace of mind which passeth human understanding.

Such was his earthly investiture: but extensive as were its powers, and glorious as was its commission, it was far exceeded by the title of Lord which was bestowed by the same high authority. By the one he held all power and dominion here; by the other were confided to him the keys of life and immortality. As an earthly potentate, he was to tread down his enemies, and extend the mightiness of his kingdom to the four corners of the globe; as a spiritual sovereign, he was to obtain the victory over death and hell, to redeem the generations of fallen man from the consequences of their crimes, and to establish his everlasting throne in the heart. Dignified with the title of the Governor of the universe, yet bearing the form and likeness of a servant, he was to exhibit such a pattern of meekness

and humility, of purity and obedience, as should display the perfect union of the human and divine natures, and shew the necessary connection between the temporal victim, and the eternal priesthood; between "the Mighty God" and "the Prince of Peace." The Jews, inflated with the hope of a conqueror who was to take exemplary vengeance upon their foes of Philistia and Edom, overlooked or neglected the prophecies which regarded his spiritual influence, and would have preferred a monarch guided by ambition and actuated by the vengeful passions, to the more elevated and beneficent character of legislator, and shepherd of his people. What wonder then, that they rejected the meek and lowly Son of Mary, who came unattended by pomp or pleasure, and who from his cradle to his grave was marked for poverty and sorrow? They could not, or would not understand the extensive designs of their Saviour and their God; they "laughed at his counsel, and would none of his reproof." Blinded by ignorance and hardened in unbelief, they followed the corrupt practices of their more immediate ancestors; and while they prided

themselves on being the seed of Abraham, and claimed the promises made to the patriarchs, they cast away the blessing, and crucified the Redeemer. Possessing so many proofs of the immediate presence of God in his temple, and of his continued mercies and visitations throughout the long line of their history, they were indeed left without excuse for neglecting the miraculous evidence of the gospel. But a much heavier condemnation lies upon us, my Christian friends, if at a more mature period, when the kingdom of the Messiah is advancing with rapid strides to the meridian of its glory, we turn our backs upon an Almighty Saviour, and live as if his invitation were of trifling importance, and the benefits which he proffers too distant or too uncertain to divert us from the daily occupations and amusements of life. Let us look to ourselves. Let us apply the warning voice to our own business and bosoms; let us embrace the blessings which are proposed to our acceptance like men who are destined for a happier scene, and who tremble to neglect so great salvation.

History contains the record of many indi-

viduals, who have sacrificed themselves for the good of their country, and who, in order to exalt their reputation above that of their contemporaries, have undergone a dreadful and ignominious death. But who ever descended from a high situation of earthly power, reduced himself willingly from the possession of all which men term happiness to the meanest station of poverty and rank, in order to do good silently, and benefit those from whom he could expect no applause, who had never heard even the mention of his name? Can it be expected then that those immortal spirits, who stand in the sight of their heavenly Father, and ever "circle his throne rejoicing," should sacrifice the unspeakable enjoyments and privileges of superior beings, in order to reconcile rebellious man to the favor of his Maker? Such an extent of goodness so entirely exceeds our comprehension, that nothing but the voice of the Almighty himself speaking through the medium of his most favored servants, and confirmed by the testimony of miracles, could enforce our conviction of its truth. What shall we say then when we are told, not that a king descended from his

throne, or a ministering spirit from his station in the presence of the Most High; but that the Son of God, the very essence of the Divinity, took upon him the form and nature of degraded man with all the burden of his infirmities and sins, in order to restore us to the state which we had forfeited by our own transgressions, and make us partakers of his felicity. In such a case what could set bounds to our gratitude and love? Could any selfish wish, could any personal gratification be put in competition with obedience to his will? Could the terror of persecution, and the dread of death, deter us from entering into his service, and fulfilling his commandments? I know that were the case privately proposed, as not likely to happen, but merely to make trial of our feelings, we should with one voice exclaim like the apostle St. Peter, "Though I die with thee, yet will I not deny thee." And yet, my brethren, the person, whose nativity we this day celebrate, surrendered the divine attributes, embraced the extreme of poverty and meanness, suffered all the injuries and insults which could be heaped upon the most contemptible of human kind,

and underwent at last between two thieves the lingering and agonizing death upon the cross, in order to rescue us from the dominion of sin and Satan, and reform the heart to the saving of the soul. Surely then we feel the gratitude which we were lately so ready to express : we are anxious to inquire into the important reasons which could call down from his heavenly mansions the incarnate God ; to ascertain his commands, and to execute his will to every tittle of the precept. Alas, my friends, can we appeal to our hearts to say that this is the fact ? Is it not rather too true, that we have listened to the history of his life and sufferings with not half the attention which we pay to the common occurrences of the day ; and that we are so culpably careless of his will as scarcely even to ask what service he requires ? When any immediate object is to be obtained by an apparent compliance with his commands, we do not hesitate to assume it ; we enter his courts, in order to maintain a good understanding, not with him and our consciences, but with those neighbours who are able to serve us, and who consider a pious demeanor as the strongest claim upon

their kindness ; and we are never backward to declare our joy at this season of general festivity, while we give ourselves very little trouble to inquire into the real nature and value of those benefits which diffuse such universal feelings of triumph and delight. Yet so glorious are the tidings which we celebrate, that they were announced by a company of Angels in a heavenly hymn : they are the fulfilment of a long line of prophecy in the birth of a Saviour ; and all those who have duly studied the sacred Scriptures, and obtained an accurate acquaintance with the inestimable blessings of which he has made us partakers, must, upon being convinced of the truth of his mission, unite in the just and animated declaration of the prophet—" Lo ! this is our God ; we have waited for him, and he will save us : this is the Lord ; we have waited for him, we will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation."

To enumerate, my friends, all the causes of our joy upon this ever-memorable day, would be an endless task ; but we may call to remembrance the most essential reasons for praise and thanksgiving, and then con-

sider how we may best testify our gratitude to him "who was wounded for our transgressions, who was bruised for our iniquities; upon whom was laid the chastisement which procured our peace, and by whose stripes we are healed."

So completely had the vices and passions of men led them astray, at an early period after the Flood, that the knowledge of the only true God became daily more circumscribed; and at last was either lost or entirely corrupted, except in the family and lineage of Abraham. But it was soon discovered that a total want of religion led to the commission of every crime, and no human laws were able to restrain those who had ceased to believe in, and to fear God. To keep mankind, therefore, within some artificial boundary, a system of morals, suitable to the peculiar views of those who were chosen to legislate, was adopted in various countries: and their observance was enforced by the fear of offending certain imaginary beings, all of whom were subject to the indulgence of human passions, and whose approbation of every act of injustice might be obtained by a proper bribe to the

priests of the temple. The evils of this system were daily increasing, and human reason struggled in vain to free itself from such fetters. The Jews retained a belief in one Almighty Father, the Maker of earth and heaven, and the tribes still went up to the temple to worship; but the original purity of their theocracy had been completely corrupted. The commandment was superseded by human interpretations; and so little did the guardians of the law attend to any thing but its forms and ceremonies, that few proselytes were made to a religion, the teachers of which acted in direct contradiction to its precepts. Our blessed Saviour came to clear it of all the superstitions which had crept in by the neglect or design of a corrupted priesthood; and abolishing the ceremonial law, while he fulfilled in his own person all the pleasure of his Father as revealed to the prophets of old, he held up an "ensign to the nations from far," and a "light to them that sat in darkness, and in the shadow of death." He shewed them that there is no efficacy in bribes offered to man or to God; that the nature of sin is unchangeable; that the sacrifice offered

daily in the temple had no power to save, but was merely a type of him; and that there is only one full and efficient sacrifice, once offered upon the cross for the sins of all men, both Pagan and Jew, the blood of the Redeemer. He gave them also in two short sentences those principles upon which hang all the law and the prophets; the love of God and the love of man. Their only consideration was to be, what line of conduct would be most pleasing to that ineffably good and wise Being, who wills the happiness of all his creatures, and who, in return for all his blessings, asks but this, that we should make our own feelings our guides, and "do unto others, as we would they should do unto us." To this conduct they were stimulated by the hope of reward, and the fear of punishment. Not such rewards and punishments as man can bestow and inflict for obedience or resistance to his will; but such as exceed the conception of human capacity; such as commence in this life by their influence over the mind, and shall be renewed throughout the ages of eternity.

This is, indeed, a revelation to be hailed with the most ardent, the most triumphant

joy. It led man to the knowledge of his Maker, not to receive the just sentence of former disobedience, but the kindest assurances of reconciliation and pardon. It enjoined for past crimes no penance but repentance. It required only a belief in him who confirmed by miracles a doctrine, whose purity proved that it could proceed from God alone; and in consequence of that belief, obedience to his will. It restricted no gratification which did not violate the laws of nature, and the social compact; but commanded to receive every gift of God with cheerfulness, and to abstain, not from temperate enjoyment, but from criminal excess. It removed the necessity of all those wars which had been waged under pretence that some favorite deity had been offended; and it destroyed all the motives to personal rancour, by taking away every pretext to the horrible opinion that there is a virtue in revenge; and by the assurance, that there is One who will in due time execute justice and judgment; who will take into his own hands the execution of his vengeance, and who will not suffer the peaceable and forgiving spirit to lose its

reward. By thus establishing a rational belief in the certainty of future retribution, and soliciting to a life of righteousness by hopes of reward and promises of pardon, it restored also that mutual confidence, without which man preys upon his fellow-countryman and neighbour, with as little remorse as would the robber of the desert ; and it sanctioned that solemn pledge of domestic peace, which binds the heart by the tenderest ties to the performance of every social duty, and adds a new and anxious stimulus to active exertions in the domestic affections of the husband and the parent.

These surely are tidings of happiest import: but the chief object of our blessed Master in coming into the world, was to free us from the curse which had fallen upon Adam for his disobedience, and to restore us to the seat which our guilty ancestor enjoyed in Paradise, together with all the expectancies and hopes to which he was heir. In pursuance of this intention, he not only made expiation for sin by his death, but set us an example of piety and virtue in the progress of his life, whose imitation would inevitably change the whole tenor of our

sentiments and feelings, and form for each individual a little world of happiness in his own breast, undisturbed by the troubles and sorrows which surround him. To strengthen and confirm this happy disposition, he promised and bestowed the consolations of his Holy Spirit; and held forth the encouraging prospects of an immortal life, when "tears should be wiped away from all faces," and grief and pain should be no more. By the pure display which he made of the Divine Attributes, he led man from the terrors of the Law, to the "Father of mercies and God of all comfort." To all the social relations, he added a grace and tenderness unknown before, by elevating the affections and smoothing the asperities of life; and many of his parables hint in no obscure terms at that recognition in the heavenly Canaan, which becomes to the surviving friend and relative the surest source of consolation, when the ties of humanity are dissolved for ever.

For such blessings, so widely scattered, and so unreservedly bestowed, no return can be too great: but the powers of man are limited, and the Great Bestower has de-

clared himself satisfied with their grateful acceptance and temperate enjoyment. But we cannot be said to receive any gift with gratitude, unless we publicly acknowledge the benefit, and apply it to the proper use for which it was designed. The Almighty Father of the universe revealed himself to us by his Son, that we might know whom to thank for the breath of life, and for all the bounties with which he has "made smooth the paths of it." He promised us another and a better life, on condition that we believed in that Son, and kept his commandments. For all his bounties here; for his protection when the body, sunk in sleep, is unable to protect itself; for his watchful eye, when we are engaged in the necessary business of life; we are bound to thank him with the rising and setting sun: and we should never partake of his creatures without devoutly acknowledging his goodness and mercy. For his promise of a happy immortality through the mediation of his Son, we are more especially assembled to thank him here, in a church consecrated to his service, and sanctified by his presence. And as we are admitted into the great

body of Christians upon the pledge of our sponsors in the face of God and the congregation, that we shall, when we are of competent age, take our vows upon ourselves, and behave as becomes the sacred name which we have assumed; we are bound to redeem that pledge, and we may be well assured, that the compact is incomplete until it has been signed and sealed at the table of our Lord. Nor are we simply in the situation of those who have been invited to a feast, and refuse to come; we have passed our words to be present at the banquet, and when he expects the fulfilment of the promise, we rudely disavow him. We openly, and in his own house, offer him such disrespect as no man of generous feelings would risk a second time from a superior, though he were clad in the robes, and clothed with the authority of a King. We tell him that, for the benefits which he vouchsafes us here, we are willing to pay him the service of the lips, as long as he continues to bestow them; and that, for the blessings of a future life, we are ready, when they come, to make him the same return; but we decline altogether his most gracious

offer, if the slightest attention on our part is necessary to obtain them. Many persons of all ranks and ages, living without God in the world, scarcely ever enter the pale of this sacred place; and when they do, the novelty of their situation sits so awkwardly upon them, as to make devotion appear, not an effusion of piety, but an insult upon their God. An attitude and manner, which would be too neglectful towards an equal, and which men venture not to assume in the presence of a superior, is deemed sufficiently decorous for the temple and the altar. Yet that altar the far greatest part of even avowed and professed Christians never approach, in order to celebrate the last institution of their Saviour; and they affect to be prevented by a mysterious terror, while their whole demeanour here evidently shews, that their attendance proceeds from curiosity or habit, and that their veneration for religion is so slight, as scarcely to employ their thoughts during the service of the church.

Can they, or have they tried to reconcile these contradictions? Or do they rather content themselves with wilful ignorance, and imagine that the minister alone is

answerable for their errors and offences? Responsible indeed he is, and deeply so, if he either neglects to communicate instruction, or is lukewarm in enforcing the necessity of Christian faith and practice; but the louder he exerts the voice of exhortation and reproof, the less inexcusable are those who listen and despise it. You are this day, my Christian Friends, called to commemorate an event which was attended by supernatural circumstances, and announced by angels; consider well, I beseech you, its momentous results. Give up some portion of this day to sober meditation, and swell the chorus of gratitude and praise. Determine to deserve in some degree the blessings which are offered you, by practising that humble piety, which, being exercised in works of charity, relies for acceptance upon the merits of a Redeemer; and refuse not to repeat the obligations of your baptismal vow at the table of the Lord. Frequent communion is the safest preparative against unforeseen accident and secret evil; it induces habits of sober meditation, it accustoms us more than any other religious office to view the Saviour in the light of love.

Gratitude must rise at the contemplation of his sufferings and death; and a sense of the victory which he has obtained for us, and the state to which he has restored us, will continually lead us to the recalling of those "good tidings of great joy," by means of which we are become heirs of his promises and partakers of his kingdom. I entreat you to recollect that you are at this moment in his presence, and that he knows the very secrets of your hearts. Not a thought glances across you, while I speak, with which he is unacquainted. Not an excuse is formed but he hears and detects it. He invites, he exhorts, he stands ready to receive you. He conjures you, as you value your immortal welfare, to hesitate no longer. He points to the sacred volume. On this very day he entered into the world to begin his sacred mission; and the Angels, who hailed his birth with hymns of praise, are ready also to celebrate your acceptance of his favor. Let not poverty or distress of mind restrain you, or make you think yourselves unworthy of his grace. He too was meek and lowly, and "had not where to lay his head." He was reviled, buffeted,

spit upon ; an object of hatred to the great ; of contempt to the meanest of mankind. To the poor he offers the riches of a heavenly kingdom ; to the wounded mind, he promises the influence of his Holy Spirit, the balm of every grief, the only effectual Comforter, under both mental and bodily affliction. He proposes to your acceptance the noblest gifts of Earth and Heaven ; here, tranquillity of soul ; there, an immortal crown. He can no more ! unless it were lawful to lift the veil, and shew the secrets of the world beyond the grave. But such an act would defeat its own intentions. To see would make it impossible to doubt ; and would destroy the exercise of that faith, upon which the promises were built, and without which no man can be wise unto salvation. That you may immediately resolve to attend his bidding, and not hesitate till you are overtaken by that awful day, when certainty will be succeeded by judgment, is the subject of my continual prayer to that mysterious Being, in whose hands are all power, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for ever.

SERMON VIII.

ROMANS X. 2.

*I bear them record that they have a zeal of God,
but not according to knowledge.*

It appears to have been the chief design of Saint Paul in the Epistle to the Romans, to point out the superiority of the Christian doctrine over the law of Moses, and the inefficacy of the latter to salvation. The Apostle was more strongly induced to enter upon the full consideration of this subject, because many of those Jews who had embraced Christianity, still clung to the observance of the ceremonies of the law, and everywhere propagated the opinion, that without the strict performance of them, no one could be saved. Their determined obstinacy on this point proceeded, perhaps, chiefly from the injury done to their national pride by the calling of the Gentiles. They had been accustomed from their earliest

infancy to consider the promise made to Abraham, as confined to those who were his natural children by descent; they cherished that promise as a most inestimable privilege; they looked forward to the expected Messiah as to a temporal King, and they grossly misinterpreted all the prophecies which respected the other nations of the world. They could never be persuaded to believe that any persons who did not claim the birthright of Jews, would be considered in the light of children; although they might partake of many of those blessings, which a system of universal empire, held by commission from Jehovah himself, must of necessity disseminate over the face of the earth. It was thus that they construed the declaration, that "in the seed of Abraham, should all nations of the earth be blessed." They thought that the Gentiles would be essentially benefitted by an equal distribution of justice, by the enjoyment of universal peace, and above all, by the knowledge of the true and only God; but themselves were to reign over them as kings and princes for ever. Hence the greater proportion of those, who had preferred such arrogant pretensions,

rejected with disdain a kingdom, whose influence was to extend over the heart; which bestowed no privilege here but such as in the early stages of the Church led to superior suffering; and which made no difference between those who had received the law from Mount Sinai, and those who had for ages "walked in darkness and in the shadow of death," but this, that the Gospel was to be preached first in order of time to the cities of Judah. For we are not to suppose, as some persons might imagine from a literal interpretation of certain texts, that, upon the universal acceptance of the Gospel by the Jews, its benefits would have been limited to that people; such a supposition would be nothing less than to set bounds to what is in its very nature unbounded, the goodness and mercy of God. Besides, we have the declaration of the Angels to the shepherds in testimony that the mission was general and unconfined: "behold, we bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people;" and our Lord's remark to the Canaanitish woman appears to have been made as well for the confirmation of this assurance, as for the trial of her faith. After

having been repulsed in her first attempt for the healing of her daughter, she came a second time, "and worshipped him, saying, Lord help me. And he answered and said, It is not meet to take the childrens' bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their Master's table." Our Saviour immediately healed her daughter, and shewed by this act, that the Gospel was not confined to those who had hitherto been called the people of God. Yet the Jews, little as such things might avail with men engrossed by temporal pursuits, in rejecting the preaching of Christianity rejected, in addition to the benefits of his coming, the glorious and perhaps exclusive privilege of being his ministers for good to all people, of exercising the more sacred functions of a perpetual priesthood, and of propagating his word in the ends of the earth. But a revelation, which had no recommendations of pomp and power, was little suited to their expectations, or the temper of their minds; and, however great might be the prospect of future reward, the thought was altogether intolerable of sharing it with those whom

they had been accustomed to look upon as an inferior species, and as outcasts from the divine presence. The Apostle seriously argues with them upon the vanity and folly of their conduct, and vindicates the judgments of God, in admitting the Gentiles into the fellowship of the Church. He clearly explains to them, that those are verily and indeed the seed of Abraham, who are his children, not according to the flesh, but after the spirit; and that in them the promises were to be fulfilled. For if the promise was to the children of Abraham after the flesh, then would all his natural descendants be partakers of it; whereas Ishmael was positively excluded. For when Abraham was grieved that Sarah desired him to cast out the bond-woman and her son, God spoke thus to him: "Let it not grieve thee, because of the lad; in all that Sarah hath said, hearken to her; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called." And afterwards, when Jacob and Esau were yet unborn, and when neither of them could have done any thing worthy of reward or of punishment, or which could make a ground of difference between them, God said to Rebecca, "two manner

of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people, and the elder shall serve the younger." It would naturally be supposed that the promised seed should come directly from that branch, to which the right of primogeniture belonged; but in this instance, the younger was preferred while in the womb, and the elder destined to be the progenitor of a wild and wandering people. "Was not Esau Jacob's brother, saith the Lord? Yet I loved Jacob and hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness."

The Apostle, in bringing forward this argument, seems to have had two objects in view; first, to shew them that a lineal descent from Abraham gave them no claim to inherit the promises, unless they were also his children by faith; and, secondly, to explain to them, that no observances of the rites and ceremonies of the law could give them a claim to the especial favor of God; but that all his goodness is the free emanation of his grace, vouchsafed to fallen creatures lying under the condemnation of his wrath, through the blood and intercession

of a Redeemer. It has been proved by the foregoing examples, that all who were of the seed of Abraham in the direct line had not inherited the promises. How then could the Jews, having refused to listen to the truths of the gospel, complain that they were preached to the Gentiles? Had the Gentiles turned a deaf ear to the heavenly voice which preached repentance and forgiveness of sins, some excuse might have been made for their conduct, on account of the gross ignorance in religious matters under which they had so long laboured. But the Jews had for ages enjoyed the benefit of the law, which was a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ; they retained the knowledge of the true God, with whom their priests held visible communication; they received from time to time fresh manifestations of his will; and they were taught, by a long and connected train of prophecies, to look for the birth of the Son of God, and to know him at his coming. Ishmael was deprived of his supposed right to have the promised seed in his line, while he was yet a boy, and Esau, ere he was capable of distinguishing between good and evil. The

Jewish nation rejected our Saviour when they were in the full maturity of knowledge, with numerous predictions to direct their judgment, and a long series of miracles to vouch for their completion. The same Almighty Power, who had of his own free grace elected Isaac and Jacob, had scrupulously and literally fulfilled the pledge given to Abraham, by offering the first fruits of the gospel of peace to his lineal descendants, and by exerting an extraordinary power in order to induce their acceptance of the blessing. It was not until every means had been employed to work a reformation of heart in them, and tried in vain, that the Apostles said, "Behold, we turn to the Gentiles." And even then, although the Jews had excluded themselves as a people from those peculiar advantages which would have been vouchsafed them under the new dispensation, the gate was still open to individuals upon equal terms with the rest of mankind. Indeed, the seed of Esau was only rejected as a nation, for Job and all his friends appear to have been of his posterity. Instead, therefore, of murmuring at the dispensations of Providence,

they had eminent reason to be thankful to God for his forbearance and long suffering. But the same pride of heart which led them to disdain the fellowship of the Gentiles, seduced them into an error still worse than the former; an error against which this epistle was particularly directed, which was so much the more dangerous, inasmuch as it tainted, not only unbelievers, but those who had become proselytes, and professed to have put on the armour of the Spirit. In the support of this error they were not deficient in activity or perseverance, and they persuaded themselves that they were actuated by conscientious and religious motives. Saint Paul deeply deplores that so much zeal should be so ill directed; and avows it to be his most constant and earnest prayer that they might be reclaimed from the path which they were pursuing, and directed in the way which leadeth unto life. When he first enters into the argument to shew who were the seed of Abraham, he says, "I say the truth in Christ; I lie not; my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart, for I could

wish that I myself were accursed from Christ, for my brethren my kinsmen according to the flesh." And in the tenth chapter he explains the cause of the anguish and tribulation which he felt on their account; "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer for Israel is, that they might be saved, for I bear them record, that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge; for they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God." They had wilfully shut their ears to all the truths and promises of the gospel; they had persisted in rejecting the very corner-stone of salvation, the atonement made for sin by the blood of Christ Jesus, and arrogantly laying down their own merits as the standard of eternal judgment, they propagated the impious doctrine, that whoever, without regard to the sacrifice of a Redeemer, performed the works of the law, the same should be saved. As the propagators of this doctrine were Jews, the refutation of it is with the utmost propriety deduced from the words of Moses, to whose authority they were

accustomed to pay implicit obedience. "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." All the sacrifices under the law were typical of the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, and as a due performance of the rites and ceremonies was to be rewarded with temporal prosperity in the land of Canaan, so faith in the efficacy of the last great sacrifice, and consequent obedience to his declared will, were to obtain a portion in that heavenly Canaan where is to be found "the fulness of joy, and pleasure for evermore." "For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, that the man which doth these things, shall live by them;" so that this righteousness is plainly not of faith, but of works, and the reward limited to the period of mortal existence. "But the righteousness which is of faith, speaketh on this wise: Say not in thy heart, who shall ascend into heaven? that is, to bring down Christ from above? Or who shall descend into the deep? that is, to bring up Christ from the dead? But what saith it? The word is nigh unto thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith which we

preach." The faith which was imputed unto Abraham for righteousness, and whose reward is eternal in the heavens, relies wholly upon the truth and power of God; it does not involve itself in doubts, and continual enquiries, how may these things be? Nor does it, by any perverse interpretation, look for the completion of prophecies after they are actually fulfilled; saying of Christ after his resurrection, who shall bring him from the confines of the grave? Or, after his ascension, who shall bring him down from heaven that he may begin his sacred mission? But what doth it say? It says, that the word of the gospel, and the effect of the promises therein contained, are easy of access, and lie open before thee. They are not veiled under obscure images, and hidden from the public eye, to be revealed only to such as are versed in the allegories of the East, and the emblems of Egyptian fable; they simply require that thou shouldest bring to the investigation a pious mind divested of prejudice, purity of intention, and simplicity of heart. Neither do they enjoin thee to perform any laborious or painful act, such as were the ceremonies of the law, in

order to possess them. When once thou art convinced of their truth, they continue to dwell within thee; they prompt thee upon every proper opportunity boldly to confess the faith of Christ crucified; and they exercise so powerful and equable an influence over the heart, as to lead it without effort to the performance of every social duty, and without presumption to the exercise of all the public charities of life. "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

Whence could it happen then that those, who were taught by Moses that the most acceptable offering to God was purity of heart, and that the first in the list of heavenly virtues were humility and obedience; whence could it happen, that such persons should maintain a religion of their own in opposition to Revelation, and demand entrance into the second Canaan, not as the boon of the Eternal, but as their own just and necessary reward? Pride, the root of all evil, seduced them into the snare: pride, which has induced men in all ages to presume upon the limited discoveries of human

reason; which led Korah and his company to rank themselves with Aaron and Moses, the priest and prophet of the Lord; which prompted the vain and foolish prayer of the Pharisee, who was enumerating his own merits, when he ought to have humbled himself in the presence of his God; and which, before the foundations of the world were laid, ere the moon lighted up her silver lamp, or the sun went forth rejoicing in his course, drew into rebellion the first of created beings, the principalities of heaven, the ministers of the Most Highest. Man, the lowest in the scale of reasonable creatures, who perish at the hiding of the countenance, and are gathered again at the bidding of their God; man cannot condescend to accept a favour even from him, although the boon be an eternity of happiness; but considers no state of existence to be a sufficient return for the few easy observances which he has commanded, or for the humble and thoroughly imperfect imitation of his Saviour's virtues. No doubt then this presumptuous being possesses within himself some sources of power, by which he can add to the glory, or increase

the happiness of his Maker. Alas! his most perfect services are so frail that they partake of the nature of that guilt, which called down from heaven the Incarnate God; and he himself, so far from adding to the felicity of others, is the sport of every wind which blows, and dependant upon the accidents of rain and sunshine, not only for his comforts, but even for his subsistence. What an object of ridicule must he present to those who, however low may be their station in the courts of Jehovah, are as far superior to man in intellect, as the giant is in bodily strength to the worm; yet who never present themselves at the footstool of the Omnipotent without veiling their face, and whose highest felicity it is to love, to obey, and to adore him!

Having thus endeavoured to explain to you the Apostle's reasoning upon these important points, I am desirous of guarding you against certain errors which have crept into the Church, in support of which the authority of St. Paul has been confidently quoted. Some persons, convinced of the inefficacy of the Jewish law to salvation, extend the argument to the Christian system;

and contend that good works, in a spiritual sense, are unnecessary and useless. They assert, that faith is the sole condition upon which everlasting happiness is promised, and that, by demanding any other requisite, we impugn God's mercy, and derogate from the merits of a Redeemer. Serious and well-educated Christians, who have been brought up "in the fear and nurture of the Lord," may possibly hold such opinions without endangering their practice; but to the ignorant and uninstructed they are full of peril, and sap the very foundations of honesty and morality. A doctrine which affects to impose no restraint upon the passions, is eagerly embraced; and the assumption of a peculiar gravity of manner and conversation is amply compensated by secret intemperance and unlimited indulgence. The disgusting vice of hypocrisy is added to personal pollution; the deluded votary, conscious of moral turpitude, arrogates to himself a particular election; and, while his whole life contributes to rank him with the profane and reprobate, he unblushingly assumes the attributes of the Eternal Judge, and consigns to everlasting punish-

ment all who worship God in sobriety and truth. Such a belief then leads naturally to the adoption of doctrines, which their author himself declared to be horrible; and the Parent of good is impiously described as bribing to the practice and extension of evil. That such effects should be produced by a religion, whose precepts were illustrated by the most perfect pattern of purity and goodness ever exhibited to an admiring world, is a manifest contradiction; and I shall briefly shew you that the doctrine of salvation by faith without works has no foundation in Scripture, leaving the consideration of the points deduced from it to a future opportunity.

We have the highest authority for saying that acts of piety and benevolence were repaid with temporal blessings under the Mosaic dispensation, and to the observance of the fifth commandment the promise of length of days is specially attached. The law of the two tables has never been abrogated: and, as the hypocrite who sounded a trumpet before him when he bestowed his alms, was gratified with the meed of public praise, so every deed of generosity and

mercy, actuated by whatever principle, "shall in no wise lose its reward." Good works, however, proceeding solely from human sympathies and affections, have no inherent claim to an eternal recompense; but in the Christian they are the necessary evidence of deep-rooted and genuine faith. When performed in obedience to the will of God, as revealed by the blessed Jesus, they become the accredited testimony of our sincerity, and a condition of our acceptance. St. Paul, commending in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews the lively faith of the Patriarchs, enumerates those instances in which it was adorned and illustrated by eminent acts of obedience. "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he, that received the promises, offered up his only begotten Son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called; accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead." Hence it is evident that a simple avowal of belief was deemed insufficient even in the Patriarch, whose public and domestic life was untainted with reproach, and that such a faith, as is effectual to our justification,

must lead not only to the common observances of morality, but to the most mortifying acts of self-denial, which can possibly be required of the man and the parent. St. James, who is very accurate and impressive in enforcing the necessity of works, and shewing that without them faith is dead, quotes this very instance in confirmation of his assertion. "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." A comparison of these passages shews, that the faith intended in the first instance was a diligent and operative faith; and it is generally supposed that the intention of St. James was to obviate those misconceptions which had been deduced from the Epistle to the Hebrews, and widely circulated throughout the Jews of the dispersion. With this view the expression,

“ by works was faith made perfect,” is peculiarly significant; and intimates that the faith proposed to the imitation of his fellow-countrymen was a perfect faith; and that no faith is perfect, unless accompanied by works, well-pleasing to God.

The foregoing explanation is still further strengthened by the example of the sacred Legislator and Prophet. “ By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; chusing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season: esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.” The confidence of Moses in the promises of the Almighty was so strong, as to induce him to forego the splendor of a court for a wandering life, beset with dangers, and harassed with afflictions. Which course he pursued in consequence of a full and satisfactory conviction, that the recompence, which he was ordained to receive, must be earned by active and persevering services. A recompence not consisting in temporal gratifications or of

limited duration, (for he was excluded from the land of promise :) but undefiled by sorrows, unimbittered with tears, extending through all time, "eternal in the heavens." Were any further evidence required, the inefficacy of a dead and inactive faith is thus briefly and powerfully exposed, "the devils believe and tremble." The possibility of a useless faith is also alluded to in the fifteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Corinthians: "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also ye have received and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached to you: unless ye have believed in vain." Unless, treating the death and sacrifice of Christ, and his promise of an everlasting inheritance, as circumstances of trifling importance, ye neglect the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy; and relapse into the defilements and pollutions of the world.

I have been exceedingly anxious to guard against the mistakes into which a misapprehension of the Apostle's reasoning might lead you, because the whole scheme and system of Calvin is founded upon the doc-

trine, that works are neither the necessary evidence of faith, nor through the blood and merits of Christ Jesus, a condition of our salvation. The whole argument is directed against the forms and ceremonies of the Mosaic law, the magnifying self-righteousness as the sole title to salvation, and the blind rejection of an atonement, as unnecessary to satisfy the justice and avert the wrath of the Most High. Let us, my beloved brethren, anxiously avoid the presumption of the Jews, and take warning by their fate. Persuaded that our salvation depends upon the union of faith and works, a "faith working by love," and that, wherever the one is mentioned as effectual to this purpose, the other is of necessity included; let us humbly embrace the means of acceptance appointed by God, abasing every high thought and every proud look, for we may be assured that a crime, against which the Apostle was employed in continual and fervent prayer for his fellow-countrymen, must be very heinous and difficult of pardon. We may observe how very soon a wrong cause throws a shade of guilt over the best passions of the heart; for St. Paul not only bears testimony to the

zeal of the Jews, but allows it to be a zeal of God, clouded and disparaged by the wilful ignorance with which it was maintained. As long as our endeavours are confined to an anxious investigation of the great truths of religion, in order to make them the rule of our actions, we can incur no blame for our exertions, for they never can outweigh the gravity of the pursuit; but we ought to be perfectly satisfied of the correctness of our tenets before we settle them as the standard of our faith, and, above all, before we attempt to make proselytes to our opinions. We must be particularly careful not to let any private interest, or any human passions, mingle with the great concerns of religion, lest zeal degenerate into persecution; and we must ever bear in mind, that erroneous doctrines held by another are no additional reason for our acceptance; but that we shall be judged without any reference to the conduct of our neighbours, solely by the purity, integrity, and operations of our faith; and we cannot keep too strict a guard at all times over our heart and tongue, "for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

SERMON IX.

ACTS xi. 18.

*Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted
repentance unto life.*

It has been shewn in a former discourse, that the Jewish nation, which had been ordained of God to preserve the true faith in the midst of that idolatry and darkness which overspread the world for so many ages, were highly jealous of their privileges, and looked upon the rest of mankind as outcasts and barbarians. The promise made to Abraham was considered by them in a limited sense, and the most distant allusion to the possible participation of the Gentiles was considered as little less than rebellion against the decrees of the Most High. So deeply were these opinions rooted in their minds, that those Jews, who were first converted to Christianity, were inclined to value it only as an exclusive gift, and began to treat St. Peter in a hostile manner for having

admitted the inhabitants of other countries into the Church by baptism. The Apostle in his vindication explained to them the matter in order, plainly shewing that he had acted, not upon his own suggestion, but by authority from above. While he was praying by himself on the housetop at Joppa, he fell into a trance, and saw a vision. A vessel, like a great sheet, was let down from heaven, in which were all kinds of beasts, birds, and creeping things, such as had been declared unclean by the law of Moses, and of which a Jew was forbidden to partake. A voice at the same time desired him to rise and eat; but he replied that he was a strict observer of the commandments, and could not violate what he considered to be his duty. He was answered a second time from heaven, and desired no longer to call that common or unclean, which God, who instituted the law of Moses, had cleansed and purified. In order to leave no doubt upon the mind of the Apostle, the vision was repeated three times, and was immediately succeeded by a circumstance intended to enforce its application. Three men arrived at the house from a neighbour-

ing city, and the Spirit desired him to go with them, although they were Gentiles, putting no difference between the Jews and them, as clean or unclean. St. Peter with six of the brethren accompanied them the following morning to Cæsarea, to the house of Cornelius, a centurion of the Roman army, who is described as eminent for piety and justice. This officer informed him, that an angel had appeared to him while he was at prayer, with an assurance that his petitions were heard; and that his alms were had in remembrance in the sight of God; and he was also desired to send to a certain house at Joppa for a person, who should tell him what it was necessary for him to do, in order to be saved. St. Peter immediately perceived the scope and tendency of the vision which had previously appeared to him, and confessed that "God was no respecter of persons," but that "in every nation he who feared him, and worked righteousness, was accepted with him." He did not therefore hesitate to perform the commission upon which he was sent, preaching to them the doctrine of Jesus, and explaining to them that the Divine Person,

whose servant he was, had risen from the dead, and being appointed Lord of all, had power to execute judgment, and to fulfil the promises which he had made to his faithful followers. And he added, that whoever believed on him should receive remission of sins. While the Apostle was yet speaking, the Holy Ghost in a visible shape fell on all those who heard the word, in the same manner as it had descended at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost; and they of the circumcision who had come with St. Peter from Joppa, and had previously entertained the opinion that the grace of God was confined to those who had complied with the injunctions of the Jewish law, "were astonished because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost." For this inspiration was attended with the knowledge of various tongues and languages, in order to enable them to circulate the doctrines and dispense the blessings of Christianity. In consequence of this miraculous visitation, St. Peter, thoroughly convinced that the Almighty had torn asunder the veil which separated the other nations of the earth from his favoured people, was desirous of

admitting these converts into the Church, and, asking if any one after so manifest a declaration could forbid water that they might be baptised, he immediately either performed that necessary ceremony himself, or directed it to be done by persons appointed for that office. This plain and faithful relation satisfied the brethren who were at Jerusalem; who had raised the objection to St. Peter's conduct, not from any improper or jealous feeling, but from a justifiable zeal for the correct observation of those customs and ceremonies, which had been handed down through many generations by the direction of Jehovah, and were so lately sanctioned by the scrupulous observance of Christ Jesus. We may observe that this virtual repeal of the ceremonial law was to them matter of joy and congratulation, for it opened a prospect of that abundant harvest which the labourers were destined to reap at no distant period: and explained the meaning of those secret intimations of their Lord, which hitherto had purposely been left in obscurity and darkness.

As the vision, which we are now considering, was intended, by putting an end to the

distinction between clean and unclean meats, to throw open the Church to the Gentiles, let us first inquire into the design of the original institution.

Circumcision and the abstaining from meats were the two points in which the Jews differed from the rest of mankind. The former was common to them with the Ishmaelites and some other nations; but the not partaking of certain animals, which were forbidden by the law of Moses as unclean, was peculiar to the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob. The divine intention in this prohibition was so completely to separate them from the inhabitants of other countries, by enjoining them the use of a particular diet, as to keep them from familiar conversation with the worshippers of monstrous images of wood and stone, and thus prevent their falling into idolatry. In order that you may understand this clearly, I refer you to the following passages in the Book of Leviticus: "I am the Lord your God, which have separated you from other people; ye shall therefore put a difference between clean beasts and unclean, and between unclean fowls and clean; and you

shall not make yourselves abominable by beast or by fowl, or by any manner of creeping thing which creepeth on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean." And again, "Ye shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine." The gracious and watchful Providence of God, therefore, had not forbidden his servants the use of certain animals, in order to curtail their means of enjoyment, or because any actual defilement was incurred by partaking of them; but that a strong motive of obedience should fortify them against that familiar intercourse, which was likely to be effectual in undermining their faith. The feasts of the heathens were always intermixed with the rites of their religion, and they concluded the day by sharing the sacrifices which had been offered to their gods. So that the commandment by which the Jews were enjoined to abstain from such animals, as were usually offered by the surrounding nations to their respective gods, precluded almost the possibility of temptation, unless men had already hardened themselves to wilful disobedience, and pur-

posedly threw themselves in the way of those degrading ceremonies which began in debauch, and ended in apostacy. Hence to revoke this command, was to throw down the barrier which separated the Jew from the Gentile, and virtually to declare that the respect paid to birth was at an end; that the promise made to Abraham was now to be fulfilled in its most extensive sense; and that, through the merits and mediation of a Saviour, all nations of the earth should be blessed, and sit down as children in the kingdom of the Most High. The emblem of the vessel with its contents let down from heaven was the more suitable to this end, because the Jewish people, in consequence of the difference made between clean and unclean meats, were accustomed to consider the persons themselves who partook of them as defiled, and to say that, in their figurative language, the term "unclean beasts" was used to signify the people of this world, who were estranged from the presence of Jehovah, and had no share in the blessings of his covenant.

It is obvious, from this account, that a Divine Revelation was necessary, in order

to authorise the Apostle to receive persons of all nations without distinction into the body of the Christian Church. Our Saviour's injunction to "go and teach and baptize all nations" was supposed by them to refer only to those of Jewish extraction who were scattered through all parts of the world. The proselytes of other countries were admitted, indeed, into the outer court of the temple, but they were still considered as unclean; and no Jew, who had any reverence for the law of Moses, would admit them to the same table. This regulation had fulfilled a most important purpose, and was now become not only useless, but an impediment to the outspread of Christianity, and the accomplishment of the purposes of God. Without its repeal no progress could be made in the march of Revelation, and the early promise of the Gospel must wither and decay. A messenger from heaven was therefore sent to destroy the veil of the spiritual temple, and his commission was performed in so intelligible and circumstantial a manner, as not only to influence the conduct of St. Peter, but to bring home conviction to the minds of those who had

been offended at his proceedings, and inclined to condemn him. From this period, being authorized by the same power which ordained the Law to overstep its boundary, they cheerfully united their efforts to circulate the doctrines of Jesus, and to bring home into one fold the sheep which were scattered over every quarter of the globe. Succeeding disciples seconded their efforts; and the fruits of their exertions are at this day visible in the multitudes of all languages who have embraced the glad tidings of salvation, and have been called from ignorance and darkness to the knowledge of their Creator and Redeemer.

The arrogance of the Jewish nation, in endeavouring to confine to themselves the invaluable privileges and blessings of the gospel, was one great instrument which led to their rejection, and which at this hour prevents them from withdrawing the veil of unbelief which lies upon their hearts. Long known by the title of "chosen of the Lord," they could not condescend to share the blessing with other nations, although no participation could detract from its fulness; and it would appear, that they preferred a

temporal dominion and the momentary gratification of political vengeance to that future and eternal existence, whose spiritual enjoyments were to be shared with the multitude of their enemies. A dispersion of nearly two thousand years has been ineffectual to the correction of this blind infatuation; and while converts are flowing into the Church from every quarter of the globe, they persist in denying "the Lord who bought them," and treat with equal neglect the precepts and the doctrines of Christianity. They were, it is true, chosen out of nations sunk in idolatry and sin, in order that they might preserve uncorrupt the oracles of God; but to say that they were selected as the sole objects of the Divine Benevolence, is to falsify those oracles in their most important predictions, and to degrade to the level of human passions and human capacities the unbounded loving-kindness and attributes of the Highest. The Jews have suffered deeply for this perversion of the intellect; and it might be thought that so constant and flagrant an example would operate strongly upon avowed Christians, and induce them to

forego all claim to superior favour, as being the common children of that Universal Parent, who is described by the Apostle as the very essence of charity and love. Yet the same fatal error has been adopted by certain members of the universal Church, who, overlooking alike the precedent and the penalty, gratify their personal pride by the assertion of a peculiar adoption, and thus loosen the ties, the necessary and indispensable ties, of morality and obedience. Such too is the nature of this persuasion, that, when once it is seated and rooted in the mind, it is seldom eradicated, and transmutes the open and generous affections into the opposite extremes of selfishness and pride. Were such opinions really founded upon Scripture Revelation, well might those who consider themselves to be the objects of such partial and irreversible decrees, plume themselves upon their acceptance; although it would still be difficult for individuals to prove that they were the gifted and peculiar people, chosen of old from the mass of mankind as objects of a merciful deliverance, and set apart for the separate enjoyment of happiness and

immortality. It is the flattering distinction contained in this unfounded doctrine which gains access to the heart, and prevents those who embrace it from perceiving the horrible tendency of an exclusion, which consigns by far the greater part of their brethren to everlasting destruction. Yet surely the very consideration that it panders to human passions might convince them that it could not originate with a just and holy God, but must be the delusion of a being, who assumes every shape, and suggests every contrivance, which can tend to the perversion of our faculties and reason. Search the Scriptures diligently, my brethren, and you will find no sufficient trace leading to so dreadful a conclusion ; for every page teems with gracious offers of general acceptance and salvation. Deep as is the stain of guilt which we imbibe from our first fatal progenitor ; extensive as are the consequences of his offence ; upon one spotless and all-sufficient sacrifice was heaped the accumulated mass of our infirmities and crimes. “ All we like sheep have gone astray ; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

How incompatible, how utterly inconsistent is this declaration of the Prophet, were everlasting happiness the consequence of a pre-ordained and irrespective decree; were the bulk of mankind irrecoverably doomed to misery and sorrow. Nay, is not so dreadful a supposition in express contradiction to the words of our blessed Saviour himself, as recorded by the beloved Apostle? "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." In what sense could the prince of this world be said to be cast out, if he still reigned supreme over the heart and will? By what perversity of reasoning could all men be said to be drawn to the presence of a merciful Redeemer, if only a remnant be the objects of his saving grace, and the rest of the species be consigned to irrecoverable ruin, without freedom of choice, or the possibility of pardon? Far be the unhallowed thought, that God would deal so harshly with his creatures! "The Lord is long suffering to us-ward: not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." The multiplicity of our

transgressions called forth the exuberance of his mercy. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that, as sin hath reigned unto death, even might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord." Such plain and express assurances of the gracious intentions of the Almighty preclude the possibility of doubt. The general condemnation, under which the world lay in consequence of the sin of Adam, was fully revoked by a subsequent decree; and death, which in the expectation of our spiritual enemy, was to include under its dominion the stock and branches of a fallen race, became the gate and inlet to more exalted and endless felicity. The possession of Adam was an earthly paradise; the heritage of his children is a heavenly kingdom. These tidings the Ministers of the Gospel are sent forth "to preach to every creature:" not as to men who, eagerly advancing to receive the choicest gifts from the hand of friendship, are to be suddenly smitten with the sword of destruction; but as to the redeemed and purchased of the Lord, whose blood is dear in his sight; whose sins are blotted out,

whose iniquity is pardoned; who, while yet afar off, are welcomed like the returning prodigal, and clad afresh in robes of purity and innocence. "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price. Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found; call ye upon him, while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." "If any man thirst," cried the blessed Jesus aloud in the temple on the last day of the feast of tabernacles, "let him come unto me and drink." To the same effect is the testimony of him, to whom was committed the Revelation of the latter days; who beheld in a vision the image of his glorified Master, "the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star." "Let him that is athirst, come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." May we not then warn those, who would arrogantly limit the bounties of the

Creator, lest they incur the plagues denounced upon such as add to, or take away from the words of the prophecy; and justly apply to them the reproof of the Holy Spirit by the mouth of Isaiah? "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord; for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle-tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

Had the Apostle Saint Paul, from whom this doctrine of predestination is professed

to be borrowed, considered himself certain of a mansion in the "eternal and enduring city," would he have expressed a doubt of his own safety, and publicly have declared that he was "careful to keep his body in subjection, lest by any means, when he had preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away?" The principal text brought to substantiate these exclusive opinions is so clearly and guardedly expressed by him, that it appears difficult to misunderstand or to wrest the meaning. The predestination there spoken of is entirely dependant upon the prescience of God, coupled with his immutable justice. Man, fallen and degraded man, is reconciled to his offended Parent by the proffered sacrifice of Christ; the conditions upon which he is again received into favour are, a humble consciousness of his own corruptions, real and unfeigned penitence for sins past, faith in the Saviour who was to be made an offering for transgressions, and steadfast purposes of amendment of life. An Almighty Being must of necessity, even before the publication of the promises, know who would accept the terms; and for them all the

occasions and accidents of life, its joys, its trials, and its sorrows, work together to the promotion of their everlasting welfare. They, being foreknown as faithful and obedient children, were on that account "predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren." To those who were thus predestinated the invitation in course of time was duly sent; they are declared to be justified by the Redeemer's merits, and shall hereafter partake the glory of his eternal inheritance. This knowledge and determination of the Most High is so far from interfering with our free-will, that it is consequent upon the effects which that free-will produces, and the course which it shall instigate us to pursue. Agreeably to this interpretation, St. Peter in his second epistle, which is addressed "to them that have obtained like precious faith" with the Apostles, "through the righteousness of God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ," exhorts them "to give all diligence to make their calling and election sure;" and he requires them, as a necessary obligation, to "add to their faith, virtue; and to virtue, know-

ledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity."

The promises of God, which are universally proffered, are accessible to all men; and may you, my brethren, press onwards in your Christian course with such earnestness and perseverance, as to obtain the prize of victory, and be finally received into that fold, which shall be gathered to the protection of one Shepherd, even Jesus Christ, our Mediator and Saviour.

In order that you may be fully sensible of the inestimable blessing to which you are called, examine the roll of ages, and reflect upon the inhuman and disgusting rites practised by our Pagan ancestors, when these islands were sunk in ignorance and darkness. To guard you against the designs of that ever-wakeful foe, who infuses poison into the fountains of living water, by substituting the legends of priestcraft for sacred records, and idolatry for the worship of the heart, think upon those eventful periods of our history, when the adoration of the creature superseded that of the Creator, and the

altar was deserted for the tablet and the shrine. The days, when our forests resounded with midnight orgies and the cries of human victims, are for ever past; but man is prone to credulity and terror, and no precaution can be too great against that baleful superstition, which fetters the understanding, debases the moral feeling, and professes to commit to erring man the keys of Earth and Heaven. The precepts and doctrines of the Church of England are founded upon the Bible; she asserts no claim to infallible judgment or exclusive privilege; the language of her Liturgy is intelligible and pure; and her ministers anxiously inculcate the necessity of that repentance granted to the Gentiles; by embracing which they are made heirs of life and immortality. Diligently attend her public services, and be assured that unremitting habits of piety and devotion best fortify the mind against those open or secret attacks which are now constantly levelled at the sober and rational believer. Be equally upon your guard against the dangerous extremes of lukewarmness and fanaticism: opposing the shield of faith to the

one, to the other the panoply of a righteous and holy life. Let no man defraud you of present tranquillity or future hope by sowing the seeds of unbelief in your hearts; or by instilling such apprehensions of the wrath of the Almighty, as begin in mental depression, and end too often in despair. Let the groundwork of your confidence be humility and penitence; let the conviction sink deep into your own minds, and earnestly impress it upon your servants, your dependants, and your children, that the first great requisite of the religion which they profess is a lowly and contrite spirit. Instruct them that their Saviour was ushered into the world by "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Teach them to look up to the Father of mercies in the all-prevailing name of Him who is "the way, the truth, and the life." Admonish them of their helpless and unfriended state without his interposition, and shew them that the Mediator of the New Covenant, while he pleads for us in his human capacity, being also an essential part of the Godhead, is himself able to forgive all the offences which

we may have committed against our neighbour and our God; and having "a name exalted above every name," is commissioned "to execute judgment also." In his presence we are at this moment, although he is unseen; and in his visible presence we shall stand at the last dreadful day, when every individual must give an account of his deeds before the companions of his earthly voyage, and the messengers who attend round the eternal throne. Where shall the guilty flee for refuge when "that day of the Lord shall come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up?" Where then shall be the soothing voice of the friend, who has been accustomed to fortify the mind in the hour of adversity, and reanimate the spirit when borne down by the torrent of distress and difficulty? At that eventful period, the eyes of all will be turned on Him whose word shall decide their fate for the ages of eternity. The associations and connections of human life will be

broken in that moment ; and those faithful servants who have anxiously waited the coming of their Master, with their "loins girded, and their lights burning," will be too fearfully engaged on their own account to bestow a thought upon others, even did they possess the ability to save. The only friend, whose assistance will then be of any avail, is He who was bruised for our iniquities, who for our sakes entered into the conflict with principalities and powers, and submitted to buffetings and ignominy from the lowest of mankind. But his friendship must be secured before we enter upon the closing scene of life, while our health, our spirits, our vigour of body and of mind, are uninjured by indulgence and natural decay ; while we are still able to offer him the tribute of active services and an uncorrupted heart. "His yoke is indeed easy, and his burden light;" but when he proposes an immortal reward to our acceptance, he requires us to divest ourselves of the corruptions of the flesh, and to raise our eyes to that cross upon which he suffered and expired. He who, while he sojourned upon earth, was prevailed upon by the faith of

the impotent and afflicted to heal their infirmities, and remit the sins which had drawn them down upon their heads, has promised equally to remit the eternal punishment of those who believe in and obey him. Defer not then, I beseech you, to conciliate his favor; but diligently investigate your eternal concerns, and hasten to pay him the homage of the heart. Resolve this day to enter upon a new course, exerting all your energies to obtain that reward of victory, which surpasses the allurements of earthly splendour, and to ensure, through the merits and intercession of a Redeemer, an inheritance in the region of happy spirits, whose "sin is forgiven," whose "iniquity is pardoned," and who ever circle the throne of their Creator with grateful hymns of praise and adoration.

SERMON X.

ISAIAH LIX. 19.

When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.

THE writings of the prophets abound in precepts of morality, and in continual warnings to the Jews to turn from the error of their ways, and walk in the paths of righteousness and judgment. Such exhortations are accompanied by threatenings and promises of extraordinary import; the expectation of the former calculated to fill them with salutary terrors, and the future completion of both to add fresh links to that long chain of prophecy which should effectually confirm the faith of future generations. The wickedness and obstinacy of the Jews compelled the Most High to the infliction of punishments unexampled in the history of nations; but his loving-kindness and mercy also led him to reveal to them those happier scenes,

when the plenteous effusion of divine grace should reconcile man to his Maker, and recal the nations of the earth from infidelity and blasphemy, to a conviction of the truth of Revelation, and to unshaken purposes of repentance and amendment of life. Isaiah, in the present chapter, vindicates the faithfulness and power of the Lord from the complaints which had been uttered against him; and points out the real cause why he suffers a favoured people to be a bye-word to their enemies, and withholds from them those consolations which had been vouchsafed to their fathers, and were promised to the children. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that he cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that he cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness. None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth; they trust in vanity and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity." The consequences

of such conduct must be the bringing down the judgments of heaven upon their devoted heads; and we know that when the measure of their iniquities was full, the cup of fury was poured out upon them, and they became a terrible and lasting example of eternal justice. That conduct, however, which led so decidedly to the overthrow and rejection of the Jewish nation, after the numerous mercies and tender compassion of their God so often exerted in vain, led to the calling in of an innumerable multitude of converts from all quarters of the globe, and to the final establishment of triumphant Christianity. A new commandment was given inculcating the necessity of universal love; and the promise of salvation through the mediation of an Immortal Intercessor brought together individuals of every nation and of every religion to the doctrine of that faith, which inculcates unremitting obedience. The Revelation given through Christ Jesus, has spread "the fear of the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun;" and while it has assured man of a happier state of being in another world, it has induced him to foster

the gentler passions, and to cultivate the milder arts of tranquillity and peace. It was foretold, however, that such a desirable constitution of society should be broken in upon in the latter days, and that the eternal and restless enemy of mankind should make so determined an attack upon the church of Christ as should threaten to destroy the very seeds of revealed truth, and make a heap of ruins of the temple and the altar. Against this rash and desperate assailant, the Comforter has undertaken to assist and animate us ; for we have been assured, that “when the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him. And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord. As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord ; my Spirit which is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.”

The points to which I wish shortly to direct your consideration on the present

occasion, are the times intended by the prophecy, the condition upon which forgiveness of sins is promised, and the blessing to be continued to those who embrace the gracious offer of salvation.

In our endeavour to ascertain the times appointed for the completion of this very important prophecy, we are greatly assisted by the line of argument adopted by Saint Paul in the eleventh chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. We ought, however, to recollect, that most of the prophecies, both of the Old and New Testament, which refer to the Advent of our Lord, have a double fulfilment; the first partial and incomplete, yet so strongly prefiguring and shadowing out its final accomplishment, as materially to enlighten our conceptions of the event, and strengthen our confidence in the wakeful superintendence and providence of God. Thus, the captivity in Babylon, and the scattering abroad the ten tribes, were types of the subjection of Judea and Jerusalem by the Romans, and the dispersion of their inhabitants over the four quarters of the globe. The description of the last judgment, delivered by our Blessed Lord to his

disciples with so many circumstances of majesty and terror, was partly fulfilled at the destruction of the Holy City, when God, by means of the Roman eagles, took vengeance upon the Jews for having rejected his offers of mercy, and crucified his Anointed. So likewise the prophecy under consideration respected the corruptions of the house of Judah when Christ Jesus was ushered into the world, as well as the infidelity of the latter days, when whole nations rushing into apostacy and crime should hasten the second Advent of their Saviour and their Judge. The whole course of events recorded in the New Testament, the precepts, exhortations, and reproofs, constantly addressed to individuals as well as to whole sects, who had broken or perverted the Law, shew that the Jewish nation had already undergone a moral revolution, and were ripe for that period when they were to be tried and purged in the fire of the refiner. Accordingly the Baptist came in the power and spirit of Elias, preaching repentance, turning "the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just," and proclaiming the approach of that Redeemer who was "suddenly to

come to his temple," a sure refuge and support to those "who turn from transgression in Jacob," but "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence" to the impenitent and unbeliever. In those times of difficulty and danger, when the depositaries of divine truth were on the point of relapsing into mental darkness, the Holy Spirit of God opposed its miraculous influence to stem the flood; He arose, who had been emphatically foretold as the sceptre and the star, laying the chief corner-stone of his universal kingdom, and guiding the nations by his light, till he should bring them safe into the haven of tranquillity and rest. This was a primary fulfilment of the prophecy. The assurance of its secondary accomplishment is fully established upon the authority of Saint Paul, where he explains to the Romans the whole counsel of the Most High. Speaking after the resurrection of Christ of the rejection of the Jews, and of the calling of the Gentiles, he says, if the latter "were cut out of the olive-tree which is wild by nature, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a good olive-tree, how much more shall the natural branches," though now cut off, "be grafted

into their own olive-tree? For I would not, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own conceits, that blindness in part as happened to Israel, till the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written, there shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. And, this is my covenant to them, when I shall take away their sins." Which remission of sins is explained in the second Epistle to the Corinthians to be consequent upon their repentance. "Even to this day when Moses is read, the veil is upon their hearts. Nevertheless when it," the Jewish nation, "shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away." Thus the Apostle, after that the Lord Jesus had come in the flesh, and obtained the victory over the prince of this world, speaks of the future Advent of a Deliverer, quoting, with a slight variation of version, the words of Isaiah in this place. This Deliverer could be no other than the same Jesus who ascended into heaven, for he alone can "save his people from their sins;" and his mighty deliverance was to be

preceded by a general want of faith and degeneracy of manners, against which the Spirit of the Lord should raise the standard of resistance. We must look, therefore, far beyond the age of the Apostles for the consummation of this prediction, and the sacred writings will assist us in developing the signs of the times. Saint Peter, in the second chapter of his Second Epistle, forewarns the Church against false teachers who should "privily bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." He proceeds also to point out the extensive influence of their doctrines, and the marks by which they might be distinguished. Such teachers arose even in the days of the Apostle, and gaining strength at various periods, have not ceased to disturb the faith, and corrupt the discipline of the whole Christian community. But the third chapter of the same Epistle is especially directed against those who should come in the latter days, rejecting altogether the faith in Jesus, holding him up to ridicule as a deceiver of the people, and treating the promise of his second coming with scorn and contempt.

These men, being divested of the fear of a future judgment, were to surrender themselves to the government of their lusts, buoyed up by the flattering but deceitful hope, that the vengeance of heaven, having been so long delayed, would for ever sleep : that the Creator was indifferent to the conduct of his creatures, and that with him righteousness and crime would be equally forgotten. "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of his coming ? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." Is it possible for any person to overlook the testimony of all history, profane as well as sacred, that the iniquities of their fathers brought a flood of waters upon the earth, and that all flesh, its pomp, its pleasures, and its possessions, were overwhelmed in the abyss ? Alas ! how easily can man deceive himself, when once he has given the reign to his passions, and surrendered his reason to the dominion of his lusts. "Of this," says the Apostle, "they are wilfully ignorant." In the madness of their soul, they refuse to

listen to the plainest facts, and measuring the attributes of the Eternal by their own limited existence, they deem him either culpably slack in the performance of his promise, or incapable of its accomplishment. Yet "the number of a man's days at the most, are a hundred years." And "as a drop of water unto the sea, and a gravel-stone in comparison of the sand, so are a thousand years unto the days of eternity. Therefore is God patient with them, and putteth forth his mercy upon them." The very slackness which they accuse, although it be as nothing in the sight of him who endureth throughout all generations, is a proof of his patience and long-suffering towards them : for he is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Having thus described the nature and conduct of those seceders from Christianity, St. Peter, anxious lest his expression of "the last days" should be misunderstood, and limited to the times when vengeance was about to be executed upon Jerusalem, proceeds to a magnificent description of the final desolation ; and having contrasted the actual destruction of the old world by water with that of "the

heavens and the earth which are now" by fire, he has precluded the possibility of an allegorical explanation, and pointed more clearly to the period, when the fulfilment of this prophecy might probably be expected. He appeals also to St. Paul in confirmation of the assurance "that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation," as well as of his description of the latter-day apostacy; and is further strengthened by the testimony of St. Jude, who reminds those to whom he wrote, of "the words which were spoken before of the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts;" whom he likewise describes as separating themselves from the Church of Christ; giving themselves up to personal indulgence; and devoid of the graces and influences of the Spirit.

Such is the state of society described by Prophets and Apostles as about to prevail in the latter days; a state subversive of every moral and religious feeling; a state equally destructive of private confidence and public security. Heresies have arisen

at various times, and individuals have been hardy enough to disclaim the faith in which they were nurtured and brought up; but have you, my friends, heard or read of any period during which so general a disbelief of the doctrines of Scripture, and such looseness of morals in consequence, ever prevailed, as were openly manifested towards the end of the last century? Has it ever been known, since the Church of Christ was first established as the religion of any country, that so open and avowed an attack has been made upon the rock on which it is founded, on its doctrines, and on its morality? If we refer to the lives and conduct of those who abetted the late convulsions in Europe, has it not been justly foretold that "these speak evil of those things which they know not; but what they know naturally as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves?" Could they be more accurately described than "as clouds without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the

blackness of darkness for ever?" The enemy has indeed come in like a flood, and even succeeded in dismantling many of the barriers which had stood the shock of ages, and which, however impaired for a time, shall still be strengthened and established so as effectually to resist the storm. And has not, let me again ask you, has not the Spirit of the Lord lifted up a standard against the destroyer, and summoned all the virtual followers of the Redeemer to strengthen their military array, and "put on the whole armour of light?" A strong and powerful religious feeling has succeeded to the apathy of unbelief: the wise and good have searched the Scriptures, not for the purpose of cavil and attack, but in order to confirm their own faith, to enlighten the minds of those who were bewildered in darkness and error, and to increase the knowledge of that inestimable communication of God to man, whose consolations are equally important to the poor and to the rich, and which are our best refuge against spiritual and mental danger. These generous and well-directed efforts have, by the blessing of the Most

High, been attended with singular success ; the Word of God has raised its warning voice both in the palace and the cottage ; Religion, gathering fresh vigour from the efforts of its adversaries, is daily restoring the barriers which had been partially borne down by the torrent of infidelity. The public profession of Christianity has been wonderfully increased, and all who engage in this spiritual warfare will certainly share the advantages obtained by its triumph. But there is an indispensable condition annexed to the blessings of its final establishment, the observance of which has been too much neglected, and even declared by some persons to be of minor importance. " The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob." To abstain from sin, and turn aside from iniquity, is a necessary step in order to fit us for the reception of the gospel of truth ; and no passport will be allowed to the second Canaan, which bears not an undeniable impress of the conversion of the heart. No one who really believes that the Almighty has revealed himself to man by his Son, and published " good tidings of great joy

unto all people," can persist in the daily commission of evil. Those who live in the light of the gospel, must regulate their course by it; and, however sinners may deceive themselves by flattering excuses, the enquiry made at the last great day will be this, whether they have given proof of their faith by the works of obedience. And to such an union of faith and works, a blessing is promised above every earthly inheritance; a blessing, which shall descend to their children's children, and be prolonged with increasing vigour in the mansions of eternity. "As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; my spirit which is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth, and for ever."

A promise more important in its consequences, or more likely to effect the great object in view, cannot easily be imagined. The end aimed at by the labours of mankind is personal happiness; and the chief purport of all social institutions is to hand down un-

impaired to the posterity of individuals the possessions accumulated by industry and perseverance. As much therefore as spiritual exceed temporal blessings in their nature and amount ; so much more eager ought we to be in their pursuit, so much more earnest to hand them down to our posterity ; so much the more grateful to the Universal Benefactor and Parent, for having called us to the knowledge of his grace, and awakened us, ere it be too late, to the dangers of sin and the necessity of repentance. Yet let us not, my beloved brethren, I beseech you, confine ourselves merely to the contemplation of these happy consequences. Let every one resolve to embrace the gracious promises of the Lord, and, by commencing a reformation within himself, set a noble and virtuous example to his neighbours and friends. Let us recal to mind his loving kindnesses which were of old, and how scrupulously he has kept the oath which he swore to David in his truth. He declared to the Royal Psalmist many hundred years before the birth of the Messiah, " of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy seat." The reign of that mighty Deliverer was not indeed of the nature con-

templated by the Jewish nation, neither has its progress been so rapid as they were fondly led to expect; but it has amply fulfilled all the predictions concerning it; and the circumstances, which at various times have hastened or retarded its course, were strongly marked by the writers both of the Old and New Testament. The very peculiar events of the last forty years have been designated with more than ordinary precision, and this instructive lesson has been most pointedly applied by the accuracy of the prophecy and its fulfilment. We are exhorted to look, during the height of the danger, for "the beacon on the mountain top, whence cometh our strength." The standard of Christianity has been raised in this happy country, and pious and active men are zealously endeavouring to stem the torrent of blasphemy and unbelief, which at one period threatened to demolish every obstacle opposed to its course. How long the contest may last between Infidelity on the one hand and Christianity on the other, it is impossible to calculate; but we know by daily experience that those, who are engaged in asserting the honour of God, and

propagating his fear, already partake the reward which shall hereafter be abundantly multiplied, and enjoy in the retirement of their bosoms that peace of mind which passeth understanding. Our warfare may be long and arduous, but it will have a glorious and triumphant close. The death-bed of the humble Christian will be cheered by the recollection of well-spent days, and illumined by the distant prospect of that sun, which from its rising to its setting shall cheer the hearts of a pious, united, and believing world. In the short period allotted to human existence, we cannot expect to see all nations become the kingdoms of God, and of his Christ; but we may earnestly hope that the dispersion of the Scriptures with proper explanation and comment will gradually prepare the way for an event which so many Prophets have foretold, and for which our Saviour has instructed us earnestly and constantly to pray. When that Divine Person first sent forth his Apostles to preach the gospel, he limited their commission; and having warned them of the persecution which they were destined to encounter, and of the necessary rapidity of their progress,

declared that they should "not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come." The towers of Jerusalem were shaken before the conclusion of their ministry; and we have urgent cause to watch with our "loins girded and our lights burning," lest He, whose appearance "shall be at a moment suddenly," prevent our zeal, and punish our neglect. To us it is enjoined to spread the blessings of his influence in the twilight of his dawn, to scatter the dews of heaven over a parched and thirsty land, to gladden the benighted soul with grateful tidings of reconciliation and peace! Numerous obstacles may oppose and weaken our exertions, but the good seed, even when committed to a soil apparently barren, will at last spring up and repay the labourer sevenfold into his bosom. Animated by this gratifying assurance, let no temporary difficulties diminish our ardour in the sacred cause: but looking steadfastly forward to the goal and resting place, let us stimulate our hopes in proportion to the impediments which beset our path. And whenever a sense of personal infirmity and error weighs upon the spirits, let us encou-

rage both ourselves and others with those gracious promises which were written for the consolation of the lowly and penitent. "For thus, saith the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. For I will not contend for ever, neither will I always be wroth, for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made." A proper sense of humiliation for past sins, and a deep-rooted confidence in the remission obtained for us by the blood of Christ, will be the strongest incentive to active services; and will operate most beneficially in the conversion of sinners, as well as in strengthening and invigorating the whole frame and constitution of the Catholic Church. Individual righteousness tends to general salvation; and by a suitable regulation of our own minds we are better enabled to instruct and advise others, and thus contribute to the diffusion of piety and virtue. Cease not then, I beseech you, to be instant in forwarding the work which

was commenced by an Almighty Saviour; and, while you promote by precept and instruction the cause for which he died, let your earnest exertions be fortified by the example of your life. Consider how inexpressibly great is the promised reward in comparison with the difficulties which you are summoned to encounter: and armed with faith, and righteousness, and hope, march boldly to the conflict. So shall the self-sufficiency of human reason fall powerless before you, and the demon of falsehood stand revealed, like Satan at the touch of the Seraph's spear. So shall the Messiah's spiritual kingdom be secure alike from secret sophistry and open violence, and yourselves partake the consummation of that triumph, when his enemies shall bow the knee before him, and the temple of the whole earth be filled with the train of his glory.

SERMON XI.

ISAIAH XI. 9.

*The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord,
as the waters cover the sea.*

THE blessings attendant upon the coming of the Messiah have been a favourite theme with the Prophets, and are described throughout in a peculiar strain of poetry and eloquence. Animated with a sacred fervour, they have included in one view the age which should receive the messenger of peace, and those remoter times, when the whole mystery of God should be accomplished, and the jarring passions of mankind give place to feelings of universal benevolence. Such lively descriptions of that Prince of Peace, whose throne is in the heart, led the Jewish nation to confound the periods of his first and second Advent, and to expect that all the happy consequences foretold by the Prophets were to follow immediately

upon the promulgation of his kingdom. Disappointed in these partial hopes, they rejected with disdain the meek and lowly Jesus, and obstructed to the utmost of their power the preaching of the Gospel. I shall endeavour however to point out to you that the nature and rapid increase of his kingdom amply fulfil the predictions concerning it, and that there are circumstances in the very chapter from which my text is taken, which evidently point to a more distant period, when all nations shall become subject to God and to his Christ; which period must of necessity be preceded by a general search after religious knowledge, and the general diffusion of religious truths.

The character and office of our Blessed Saviour is no where more accurately described than by Isaiah in this place. He was to come not as the prophets who preceded him, elevated by momentary inspiration, and referring at every step to the Omnipotent for instruction and assistance; but possessing within himself the divine Spirit of wisdom and understanding, and exercising his functions with personal authority. He was not to decide from out-

ward appearances, nor to be influenced by the profession of the lips; but enjoying all the powers of the natural and moral world, he was to judge solely by the secrets of the heart. For the poor he was to plead, for the meek he was to reprove; "to smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips to slay the wicked." Which expressions plainly import, not the oppressive exercise of political power, or the inflictions of bodily chastisement; but such extensive spiritual condemnation as should bring conviction to the soul, and effect that conversion of the inward man which should lead him utterly to abhor his evil imaginations, and cultivate the virtues of self-denial, meekness, and humility. Was not this indeed the character of the Son of Mary? I appeal to his memorable discourses on the Mount, to prove his tender consideration for the poor and the lowly; for those who are overcome with bodily infirmity, and the afflicted in spirit. I call to witness his exhortations and reproofs to the self-righteous Pharisees, his forcible reprehension of their overbearing and oppressive conduct; to shew the dignity

with which he asserted his authority as the Universal Judge, who came once in the form of a servant to sow the righteous seed, and who shall come again at the latter day to reap the harvest in glory. A stubborn and perverse generation refused to listen to his admonitions, or to acknowledge his title; but the increase of his dominion, immediately after his ascension, far exceeded the most sanguine expectations which could have been entertained of an earthly conqueror, and amply fulfilled the declaration of the God of Israel: "a little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation; I the Lord will accomplish it in his (that is, the Messiah's) time."

It is here worthy of remark, what little progress the doctrines of Christianity made during the active ministry of Jesus, and how generally they became disseminated almost immediately after his decease, when he was no longer present to enforce them by his miracles, and illustrate precept by example. But the Son of God came to make atonement for sin by the sacrifice of himself, and thereby reconcile man to an offended Parent. Had the diffusion of the

Gospel been as general in the first instance, as it became after the descent of the Holy Ghost, the disciples of Christ would scarcely have suffered their Divine Master to have been quietly led to a painful and ignominious death; the ardent temper of Saint Peter would have communicated flame to his companions; and instead of the peaceful oblation which followed, the zealous but misdirected devotion of an Apostle might have deluged Jerusalem with the blood of her citizens. To set bounds to the progress of the Gospel, while its Author sojourned amongst men, appears therefore to have been an essential part of the divine scheme: and the small number of its professors at the outset served as the strongest contrast to that innumerable multitude which hastened afterwards to embrace its promises, and was ready to suffer in its defence. Its infancy sprung up miraculously into manhood, and the feeble arm of childhood wielded on a sudden the strength of mighty nations. The enrolled disciples amounted at the period of the resurrection to one hundred and twenty names: the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost,

when Saint Peter first proclaimed the Gospel to the Gentiles, was succeeded by the conversion of three thousand souls. After this "the number of the disciples multiplied greatly" even in proportion to their former increase; Jerusalem was filled with converts, who, to prove their zeal and devotion, were not contented to limit their exertions to the walls of the Holy City, or the confines of Judea; but were eager to propagate the faith in the remotest corners of the earth. Within forty years, Scythia, Gaul, India, and the more polished states of Italy, and Egypt, became equally the theatre of their ministry; and so mightily did the word of God grow and prevail through the agency of man, that it shortly whelmed in irrecoverable ruin the heathen rites and idols of antiquity. That those who lived in the first ages of Christianity did not merely profess, but actually believed and embraced its doctrines, is sufficiently evinced by their patient endurance of calamity and death; and before two centuries had elapsed, the apologists for the new faith represented to the Roman emperors who threatened persecution, that their courts, their camps, their cities, and

their provinces, all swarmed with Christians, who were enthusiasts in the cause; and that to attempt to extirpate them, would be to destroy the far greater and most peaceable and useful portion of their subjects.

Surely, my brethren, these facts which are matters of history, fully justify the triumphant tone assumed by the Prophets. The Jews, referring all the predictions concerning the kingdom of the Messiah to one period of time, naturally expected a mighty conqueror, who was to propagate their religion by the sword, and extend their temporal dominion to the ends of the earth. But the progress of opinion is at first imperceptible and silent; it advances by persuasion, by example, and by precept; and thus the mild doctrines of the Gospel have continued to make their way in defiance of opposition; and, wherever their cheering influence has been felt, the milder affections have succeeded to ferocity and pride. The blessings which have already resulted from their diffusion, and the progress which they have already made, are sufficient pledges to us, that they shall continue their march till all nations flow into the temple of the Holy

One; and "the earth be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Then, and not till then, shall the remaining prophecies contained in this chapter be fulfilled; for "it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush; and from Elam, and from Shinah, and from Hameth, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth? The Jews expected the accomplishment of this prophecy immediately upon the coming of the Promised Seed, by the return of the ten tribes which had been led into captivity; but, instead of the looked-for restoration, a sudden vengeance fell upon themselves, and those who remained in Judah and Jerusalem, were scattered to the four winds of heaven. And in order that no partial gathering of that afflicted people may be construed into the accomplishment of the prediction, we are informed,

that their return to their native land shall be accompanied by signs and wonders, with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm, as of old; and their line of march is actually pointed out, and some of the miracles specified, which shall attest to the world that their leader is "the Mighty God, the Holy One of Israel." "And the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dry shod. And there shall be a highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left from Assyria, like as it was to Israel, in the day when he came up out of the land of Egypt."

To the dawning of that glorious day, the Prophets, the Apostles, and the wise and good of all ages which have enjoyed the Christian dispensation, have looked forward with fervent hope; and conscious that it must be preceded by the universal acceptance of that perfect Law of righteousness, which the Son of God himself came down to proclaim and establish, they have laboured in various ways to hasten its coming.

No perverseness of man can bring to nought, or delay the counsels of almighty wisdom; yet it pleases God frequently to act by human as well as by heavenly means; and we, as his subordinate instruments, are bound to forward the work, as the best proof which we can give of our faith, and our obedience. Our Saviour has assured us, that the days of tribulation, which shall more immediately precede that period, shall be shortened for the sake of the elect; in the brief and comprehensive prayer which he has given us, he has instructed us to offer up a petition to that effect; and we, who minister the service of the Christian temple, are commanded "to go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

Great however must be the obstacles to our labours in the foreign vineyard, while the practice of the Christian is frequently in such contradiction to the precepts of his religion: and while various opinions upon points of doctrine continue to divide us into so many different sects, and make men more anxious to gain over proselytes to their own peculiar tenets than to cultivate "the spirit

of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord." The zeal of the present day for sending out missions to those nations, who have never heard the name of Jesus, is good in its principle, and laudable in its efforts; but it appears to me that little will be effected, until we shall have settled our faith, and reformed our practice. Unity of belief amongst Christians will be a tower of strength against the face of the adversaries; and those who really and truly believe will be most strenuous in the conversion of others, while the perfect unison observable in their lives and precepts will contribute more essentially perhaps than any other circumstance to advance the great work of salvation. One of the most powerful means for the attainment of this desirable end is to induce the lower classes constantly to attend the service of the sabbath. The rich have innumerable opportunities of searching the Scriptures; the poor have but one day in the week both for rest and instruction; and on that day are too often led to consult their present ease and amusement, rather than to inquire into the grounds of their future and eternal happiness. Yet unless

the principles of religion and virtue are earnestly and constantly instilled into their minds, no very sanguine hopes can be entertained of such general success as is necessary to promote that diffusion of religious truths which we are now considering. The poor constitute the bulk of mankind; and it is only by instructing and directing them; by cherishing objects of nobler emulation, and pointing to prospects of sublimer hope; by continually explaining to them the great end for which man was formed; his fall from a state of happiness to misery and death, his consequent corruption, and final redemption in Christ Jesus; and by inculcating the absolute necessity of faith in that Saviour, and of humility and obedience, the only efficacious fruits of faith, that we shall be able to lay the foundation of that glorious edifice, which shall receive both Jew and Gentile to the same communion, and whose bloodless sacrifice shall be an offering of the heart.

The importance attached by our blessed Saviour himself to the instruction of those who are themselves incapable of investigating the sacred writings, and how greatly

he considered it a proof of the identity of the Messiah, are shewn by his answer to the disciples of John, when they were sent to ask him "art thou he that should come or look we for another?" "Go," said he, "and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see; the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, who-soever shall not be offended in me." He appealed in few words to the miracles which he performed, in proof that he was the rock in which they were to trust; such miracles as could be performed only by the finger of God; and he concluded with a blessing upon those who should impute to the right source these most astonishing workings of divine power; who should consider them as living evidences that he was the person to whom all the Prophets gave witness, and who, in consequence of that belief, should "walk in his ways, that he set before them." It had been foretold, that such would be the signs which would attend the coming of the Prince of Peace, and

the Jews were taught to expect them as proofs of his divinity. "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not; behold your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence, he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing, for in the wilderness waters shall break out, and streams in the desert." Nothing could be a greater proof of his being the Messiah than this endowment of supernatural gifts, not any thing a stronger and more direct fulfilment of the prophecies; yet there is one circumstance upon which he appears to have laid a still greater stress; which he has put last in this enumeration of blessings, as most important; and to which he in another place appealed as the great end of his coming. "The poor have the Gospel preached to them." To open the ears of the deaf and the eyes of the blind, were the signs by which he was to be known; but these wonders were not to recommend him to the rich and powerful as one who was by these means to lead them to vic-

tory, and subdue the nations under them; they were to prepare the minds of all men for the reception of the new covenant, whose sublime promises were to put them upon an equality as far as regarded heavenly things; which should assure those who laboured under misfortunes and poverty here, that they were equally the care of their Maker with the nobles of the land; that "to whom much is given, of him will much be required;" and which should say to all who underwent with patience the privations of this life, "Great is your reward in heaven."

Let me then address myself particularly to those who, labouring under trials and difficulties, consider themselves unfitted for the service of God, and rashly give themselves up to negligence and despondence. To you, my poorer brethren, the Saviour was peculiarly sent; for you he trod with weary step the circuit of a hostile and rebellious land; for you he encountered the malice of mortal and immortal powers; for you he bared his head to the night-wind, and his bosom to the storm. Listen to the condescending tones in which he has ad-

dressed you ; let his mild expostulations sink deep into your hearts ; be fearful to incur the severity of his rebuke. Desert not those sacred edifices which the piety of your forefathers erected to his praise, seize rather every opportunity of entering his house, and attending to his commands. Enquire into the circumstance of his unhonoured life ; and mark the impression made upon his mind by insult and affliction, by poverty and contempt. Observe that every act of injury drew him still closer to his heavenly Father ; and when his frame was borne down with the whole weight and burden of our sins, he sought not relief in the bitterness of complaint, but humbled himself in solitary communion with the Almighty Disposer of events, and resigned himself entirely to the pleasure of his will. Yet this sublime pattern of humility and patient endurance was himself pure and spotless, and had done nothing deserving of punishment or wrath. Although he was reduced to the lowest degree of indigence, and at last “ numbered with the transgressors,” no language can describe the dignity of his office or the immensity of his sacrifice. This was the person

foretold by the Prophets, the seed promised to the woman, the sceptre which was to come out of Jacob, the star which was to arise out of Israel; and the Gospel, which is to this day preached to all nations, remains a standing miracle that its Author was Divine. It was not propagated by the sword; it has ever spoken the language of peace. In opposition to the religion of the masters of the world; recommending the difficult doctrines of self-denial, and love to our enemies; without pomp or luxury to allure those who were devoted to sensual pleasures, it has gradually made its silent way against the violence of persecution, and has caused "the rose to blossom in the wilderness." Wherever its doctrines have been perverted, and employed for the increase of temporal power, champions have been found, careless of their safety, to restore its purity; whenever fanaticism has debased its sanctity, when "our young men have seen visions, and our old men dreamt dreams;" there have not been wanting men to hold up its steady light to the delusion, and dissipate it like the mists of night, when "the sun goeth as a bridegroom out of his

chamber, and rejoiceth as a giant to run his course." Ministers have been regularly appointed, who derive their authority in a direct line from Christ himself, to preach it to all who will come to hear it; and the poor, who are desirous to be taught the way of life, can never be at a loss for instruction, if they resort to those who, having made the Scriptures their study, are best qualified by their learning and office to explain its mysteries; to enforce with salutary terrors the necessity of living according to its precepts; and to clear up all those doubts and misgivings which naturally affect the tender conscience, and which, when touched by an unskilful, or by too rough an hand, become eminently dangerous, and have sometimes hurried men into despair, and even into madness. Every one ordained to this ministry partakes of that divine inspiration, which operates, not by sudden and violent attacks, as enforcing conviction in a moment: but which prompts us to ponder well the promises and denunciations of the Gospel; which incites us to the study of it; which leads us gently and step by step to the proofs upon which it rests; which esta-

blishes our faith upon firm foundations; which raises in our minds a restless anxiety to impress the same belief upon others; which directs us to recommend it constantly and mildly, by precept and by example, with temper and with patience; and which gives to all who ask, in proportion to their wants, clearness to explain its doctrines, and eloquence to defend them. Those who pretend to any higher inspiration than this, deceive their flocks, and perhaps themselves. This is all-sufficient for the present necessity. In the first ages of Christianity the Apostles were gifted with extraordinary powers; but they had to contend with superstitions sanctioned by length of time, supported by the civil government, and handed down from generation to generation. We have the Bible in our hands, the incontestable witness of Revelation, the completion of the promises made to the fathers, the words of eternal life. This will enable us to confute all the attacks of the infidel, and to give "light to those that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death." In afflictions it is a consolation, in difficulties it is a guide; we may not, we dare not

pervert it; for we are strictly commanded to preach this, and this only; and upon this condition our gracious Master has promised to be "with us always, even unto the end of the world."

SERMON XII.

PSALM LXXVI. 6.

*At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and
the horse are cast into a deep sleep.*

THIS Psalm is supposed to have been written after the miraculous destruction of the Assyrian army by the Angel of the Lord, in the days of Hezekiah, king of Israel. Sennacherib had encamped against Jerusalem with a mighty host, which to the eye of man appeared to be irresistible, but which withered away in a single night, and in the morning was no more. The prophet's description of their destruction is equally beautiful and just. "The stout-hearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep; and none of the men of might have found their hands." Those who in the pride of their heart had not doubted of sharing amongst themselves the spoil of the holy city, in a

few hours became a prey to the adversary whom they had despised ; they never awaked again to the enjoyment of their faculties ; and those hands, so long accustomed to the work of destruction, were fated no more to wield the sword, or to divide the spoil. A destruction so sudden and complete had not occurred in the history of the chosen people, since the time of Pharaoh ; and that the nations of the earth might know that the God of Israel was the God of the whole world, who alone giveth strength in the day of battle, and that this ruin was accomplished by no human arm, it occurred in the dead of the night, when all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were wrapped in unconscious slumbers. Who could be witness to such a devastation, and hesitate to acknowledge the omnipotence of that God, who withered the might of one hundred and eighty-five thousand men in a moment ? Who can listen to the recital, at this distance of time, without joining in the exclamation of the Psalmist, " Thou, even thou art to be feared ; and who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry ? Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee : the re-

mainder of wrath shalt thou restrain. Vow; and pay unto the Lord thy God: let all that be round about him bring presents unto him that ought to be feared. He shall cut off the spirit of princes: he is terrible to the kings of the earth." Whatever the bad passions of mankind may determine to perform, is vain without his permission, and shall eventually turn to his honour and glory. Ascribe unto him, therefore, the praise of every great and merciful deliverance, for "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong," but the mightiest potentates are mere instruments in the hands of him who hath said to the troubled ocean, "thus far shalt thou come, and no farther: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed."

The discomfiture of Sennacherib was accomplished without the intervention of human aid, in compliance with the prayer of king Hezekiah, at a time when the Jews were reduced to the lowest degree of weakness. And God accompanied this signal deliverance with a sign peculiarly expressive of his favour towards his chosen people. The next year being the sabbatical year, or year of rest for their land, during which they

were permitted neither to sow nor to reap, he promised that the earth should of itself, without labour or tillage, produce sufficient for their support. He also added a most gracious assurance that the house of Judah should flourish, and that in every age a remnant should go forth from Jerusalem. Hezekiah conducted his future government so as to manifest his gratitude; and after a long and glorious reign, was gathered to the grave of his fathers in happiness and peace.

The particular points, which this history is calculated to impress upon the mind, are the vanity and folly of human arrogance and power; the condescension with which the Omnipotent is pleased to listen to the petitions of good men, and the interest taken by him in the welfare of those nations who serve him.

Sennacherib, who governed Nineveh, had extended his empire over a considerable portion of the continent of Asia, and boasted that none of the gods of the heathen had been able to deliver their worshippers out of his hand. Buoyed up with pride, and made arrogant by success, he expected no limit to the extent of his conquests, and was

astonished at meeting with resistance from so small a country as the land of Judea. Relying on the superior power of the image to which he paid homage, he vented himself in blasphemies against the Ruler of the universe, and was doomed to experience by a fatal reverse, that the mightiest armaments are but dust in the balance, when weighed against him whom he had impiously reproached. How different was the conduct of the Jewish king, who had been brought up in humble reliance upon the only true God, the Lord Jehovah; and who implicitly depended upon his promises, that those who worshipped him in sincerity, should enjoy his favour and protection. To so feeble a state were his subjects at that time reduced, that Sennacherib offered him horses if he could set riders upon them. Yet the reliance of Hezekiah was unshaken, although it was evident, that only preternatural assistance could relieve him from his difficulties. His prayer was heard, his affliction was relieved; his confidence and faith did not lose their reward. The promptness with which Israel was at that time preserved from impending danger, and the support which they

afterwards received from the spontaneous produce of the soil, shew how watchful an eye the Almighty keeps over peoples and nations, and how ready he is at all times to relieve those communities who love him, and obey him. This interesting fact, that the piety of individuals pleads strongly for nations as well as for themselves, should be kept strictly in view by all who are anxious for the welfare of their country. Upon this principle the rulers of our own government have uniformly acted in the day of our distress; and although the dangers which lately threatened us are past, it is wise in the tranquillity of peace to strengthen our bulwarks with the alliance of Him who alone is able to save; and to consider how we may best ensure to ourselves a public interest in his friendship, and provide by anticipation a never-failing support against periods of difficulty and trouble.

Great and important, my brethren, as was this preservation of Jerusalem in the reign of Hezekiah, the overthrow of the spoiler of nations, to which our attention this day is particularly directed, was equally the work of the Eternal, and no less important to the

whole Christian world. Let us advert to the peculiar circumstances of the enemy so happily overcome, the probable consequences of his success, and the signal nature of his overthrow, in order that we may perceive the full extent of that debt of gratitude which we owe to the Supreme Disposer of events, and under him to those brave men who have been the glorious instruments of his vengeance and our deliverance.

It was a peculiar feature of the late contest, that we were engaged with a people in open rebellion against their lawful Prince, for the support of an Usurper, who is an alien to their name and country. When two nations are at variance under legitimate leaders, they usually contend for some avowed object, upon the attainment of which, the contest is to terminate. Both countries look eagerly forward to a state of peace, and console themselves with the reflection, that every exertion will be made to mitigate the calamities of war. Legitimate monarchs feel also for their subjects as their fellow-countrymen and children; watch over them with parental tenderness, and carefully prevent all unnecessary effusion of blood.

In this instance, the object on the part of France, was not public security, but to establish a throne cemented by treason and rebellion ; to consolidate the slavery of a people bound once more in the fetters of a military despotism ; and, under false pretences, to advance by insensible degrees to unlimited sovereignty. A despotic and usurped power is always jealous of surrounding states, because its example and influence must be dreaded, and its downfall conspired by all legitimate authorities. In its very nature, therefore, it is restless and intriguing ; dissatisfied in peace, remorseless in conquest ; in defeat retiring only that it may recruit its strength, and extend afresh its principles and its dominion. Such circumstances, evidently increasing the duration as well as the horrors of a contest, heighten our gratitude to those who have lavished their blood in the united cause of their country and of Europe ; and who, in one single day, have overthrown, beyond hope of recovery, as dreadful a tyranny as ever threatened to overwhelm the nations of the world.

No one here can be so light of soul, as to

have forgotten the calamities which for so long a period laid waste the continent, and threatened to extinguish those elevated feelings which raise man above "the brutes that perish." No one can have forgotten that insidious policy which, with peace upon its tongue, carried a two-edged sword in its hand; which violated every sacred pledge; and which condescended to flatter only in order to destroy. Doubtless the system which had formerly been so successful would still have been pursued; and a government exasperated by defeat would have left no respite to Europe, till its former trophies had been recovered, and the discomfited nations had washed out with their blood every vestige of their recent victories. No plea of intercourse or alliance, no tie of morality or religion, would have impeded its course; universal would have been the deluge, and complete the ruin. How devoutly ought we then to adore the all-powerful and benevolent Governor of the universe, who seems to have threatened us with a recurrence of his judgments only to make us more sensible of our dependence, and to inspire that salutary fear which produces in nations,

as well as individuals, the chastened feelings of a humbled and grateful heart.

The conquest of a country has generally been the work of years, attended by frequent battles and various success. The victory which we celebrate, in one hour shook to its foundations a military throne. It left our opponent no alternative, but an unconditional appeal to the honour and mercy of Great Britain; and she, who weathered the storm when the noblest trees of the forest bent before the tempest, was chosen from among the nations as the only one to whom the discomfited usurper could trust himself with safety. This tribute is the more glorious as having been unwillingly paid by one, who, considering her the great obstacle to his success, had heaped her name with every calumny, and whose chief aim it was to lay her bulwarks in the dust. The rout of the foe in the embattled field has circled her brows with an unfading wreath; but this triumph of honourable principle is the brightest jewel in her crown of glory. It is the consummation of more than her pride could hope for, of all that her heart could wish; and, when the record of the present

age shall be perused by our posterity, the starting tear shall be accompanied by the gratifying reflection, that she left no rival in military prowess, and that her valour was equalled by her public virtues.

To the Omnipotent for all the blessings of his ordinary providence, for his protection throughout the labours of the day, and during the unguarded hours of sleep, we offer up our morning and evening tribute of thanks and praise ; to which it is our duty to add our unfeigned sense of the public mercies lately experienced. By constantly recurring to these marks of his goodness, when we are engaged in the act of prayer, we shall impress a more lasting record upon the mind, and raise within ourselves a more lively feeling of his gracious interposition. In those awful moments of self-humiliation, when the world, its pleasures, and its vanities are lost in the contemplation of heavenly objects, we must remember how much individual guilt adds to the weight of a nation's sins, and calls for a general and national repentance. We must, at the same time, call to mind the necessity and extensive influence of that purity of heart and holiness of

life, which could prevail with the Almighty to spare a profligate city, if only ten righteous persons were found within its walls. Such reflections will be the surest inducement to persevere in the paths of virtue both for the sake of our country and ourselves; and the most pleasing return to the Eternal for all the benefits showered upon his undeserving children, as well as the most beneficial to our present and future interests, is an implicit observance of his revealed will, a humble confidence in the merits and death of his Son, and an undeviating and unshaken obedience. Who knows how often the pure and all-seeing God has prepared his ministers of vengeance to destroy utterly a nation dead in trespasses and sins, and has relented to the effectual fervent prayer of the few who are righteous? Who can tell but that the avenging Angel is even now prepared to execute judgment upon the "vessels of his wrath, fitted to destruction," whose misdeeds are come up in remembrance before the Most High? If other nations have drunk deeply of the cup of his indignation, while we have been partially afflicted, such an exemption is not

to be imputed to our righteousness, but to his forbearance and long-suffering. We appear righteous in comparison with a country avowedly tainted with unbelief, which has long since cast aside every restraint of morality and religion; but we are justly obnoxious to the fate destined for Nineveh of old, unless like her we turn to the Lord our God with weeping, fasting, and prayer. A high sense of public principle may have pleaded strongly for us at the throne of mercy, but the unexampled frequency of vice and crime, which stains our present annals, must sooner or later bring down destruction upon our heads. Let us individually determine, that the pitiful loving-kindness of the Lord shall not have been exerted in vain; let us endeavour to testify our grateful acceptance of his favour by a thorough reformation of heart, and by inculcating a sense of our utter unworthiness and entire dependence upon him, into the minds of our brethren, our dependants, and our children. Not that he derives any increase of power or happiness from our feeble services, or any gratification from our imperfect praises; but by living in commu-

nion with his church, we are adding to our own felicity, and have the satisfaction to know that we are fulfilling his will, and scrupulously adhering to the way in which he has expressly commanded us to serve him. Few and easy are the observances which he has enjoined, and all such as are absolutely necessary to promote the welfare of civilized man. "What does the Lord thy God require of thee," says the Prophet Micah, "but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" And to the exact performance of these duties, he has annexed the greatest blessings both of the earthly and heavenly Canaan; here, length of days and tranquillity of mind; there, the society of superior spirits, a happiness which knows no change, an existence which continually advances to perfection, and a crown of immortality.

Such is the conduct required of us in order to shew our gratitude to God; which consists not in repaying a benefit, but in actually receiving an additional reward. The debt due to our fellow-countrymen, who have been the instruments of such great events, is of a very different nature; and as

far as pecuniary assistance and the consolations of humanity can compensate the evils of war, it is in our power to repay it to a limited extent. It is not given to man to recal a friend or relation from that unknown country to which we all are hastening; but he may supply to the mourner those comforts which the husband or child had been accustomed to procure; the loss of which adds an additional pang to calamity, and tends to make old age still more desolate. If any of our neighbours have unfortunately lost their nearest connections in the cause of our common country, we shall find many opportunities to mitigate their sorrow, when its first violence shall have exhausted itself, and the bitterness of death be past. To listen with unwearied patience to the tale of woe, to mingle our tears with those of the unhappy, to call the nobler feelings into activity by dwelling on the good qualities, or by reciting some honourable trait in the character of the person who is no more, are all in different degrees alleviations of individual grief, and make more smooth the rugged paths of misfortune. But those to whom we may be able to address these acts

of kindness, must be few indeed in comparison with the numbers who suffer at a distance, to whom it is our duty to extend pecuniary relief. No one who hears me is capable, I hope, of withholding assistance at any time from the poor and the unhappy; and I cannot plead in vain to the generous mind for those who are recommended by so many additional claims to your benevolence. The cause for which they fought, the numerous benefits which they have purchased for us with their lives, the objects which have been accomplished without the prospects of any further waste of treasure or of blood, and, above all, the influence of this sacred place into which none should enter without having their hearts attuned to all the charities of life; these combine to give irresistible influence to an application, which can borrow no aid from adventitious ornament, and whose best support is the simple eloquence of truth. I will not lead you back to the field of destruction, where every object contributes to harrow up the soul, in order to work upon your feelings; I confidently commit this cause to your charity and your reason. Neither will I enumerate the crowd

of those who retain the vital principle without the perfect form of man, nor summon before you the maimed, the halt, and the blind. I implicitly submit this appeal to the natural suggestions of your hearts. Those who have passed from Time to Eternity in the course of the mortal conflict, have earned a never-dying meed of fame; and I should be unjust to the noblest principles of our nature, if I added a syllable to enforce the claim which their surviving relatives have upon your bounty. In the trying moments of personal affliction, when all which once pleased so highly shall cease to charm; when the favourite pursuits of youth and manhood shall no longer delight; when those natural beauties which continue to retain their influence when all other sources of enjoyment are neglected, shall fade upon the imagination; even in the last dread and awful hour, when the soul is summoned to its eternal reward, nothing can tend so much to support the departing spirit, next to confidence in the merits of a Redeemer, as the recollection of disinterested and well-directed benevolence. Job, surrounded by afflictions, was not ashamed even in the presence of

his Maker, to enumerate the charitable uses which he had made of prosperity; and think, my brethren, should any change of fortune deprive us of the comforts and necessities of life, or cut off our dearest connections in the flower of their Spring, (for we are all liable to accidents and reverses,) how consoling will it be to say within ourselves, "the good things of this life are passed away from me, but the uses to which I dedicated them, remain with me for ever. I contributed my mite to the support of the desolate and childless, when the staff of his age was torn rudely from his hand; I assuaged the tears of the desponding relative deprived of a brother's protection; and made the widow's heart to sing for joy. By my assistance, the fatherless and 'he that had no helper,' was redeemed from poverty and ignorance to habits of virtuous industry, and the knowledge of his Maker. And the effects of my beneficence may not be limited to the individual, for he may tread hereafter in the steps of his parent, and be led at some distant period with a grateful sense of former benefits, to sustain like him the battles of his country." May such consi-

derations induce you, my Christian friends, to give to the relief of your less fortunate and afflicted countrymen with no sparing hand, and "with the same measure that ye mete, may it be meted unto you again," by him, who in the day of final retribution, shall declare, "inasmuch as ye have given a cup of cold water unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

SERMON XIII.

ST. JOHN XXI. 15.

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, feed my lambs.

HAVING first considered the peculiar situation in which Saint Peter stood with respect to his crucified Master, and the circumstances of the moment when the scene described by the Evangelist took place, I shall endeavour to impress upon your minds the necessity of manifesting our faith by the liberal fruits of charity and obedience. For never was a more important command delivered than this which is contained in the text, whether we consider the nature and extent of the precept, the time of its delivery, the office of the person to whom it was conveyed, or the dignity of Him by

whom it was enjoined. It extends to all ages, and through all time, regulating and invigorating the spiritual discipline of the Church; and the food, which it directs us to supply, is not adapted to the support of the material frame; but such as may stimulate the mental appetite, enrich the understanding, and animate the heart. The precise period at which it was delivered was particularly suited to render the impulse thus given more lasting and efficacious; for, while life or memory remained, no one of the disciples, who were present upon this occasion, could endure to consign it to forgetfulness or neglect. The person, to whom it was conveyed, was designated as the future Head of the Gentiles; the Rock upon which the Universal Church was ordained to be built; the favoured Messenger, through whom the law of exclusion was first to be repealed; who was to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins to the nations which knew not God, and to throw open the everlasting doors to those who had hitherto been restrained to the outer court of the temple. But what mortal tongue can adequately describe the dignity of Him,

from whom this commission was received? His coming in the flesh, which had been prefigured to Adam, and more plainly declared to the Patriarchs, was for centuries anxiously expected by kings and prophets; and he had been emphatically called "the desire of all nations." To him every knee was to bow, whether in earth or heaven; upon his intercession and merits the spirits of all flesh were to depend for acceptance; and at his judgment-seat must the inhabitants of the earth appear, from its creation to its final dissolution. Let us keep these things steadily in view, while we proceed in the investigation of our subject; and may the awful conviction of his supreme authority incline us to bend to the intimations of his will, and to honour him, not with the service of the lips, but with the more grateful homage of discriminating and well-directed benevolence.

While our blessed Saviour sojourned amongst men, he upon various occasions explained to his disciples the predictions of the Prophets concerning him, and gradually revealed the necessity of his sufferings and death. He hinted also at the circumstances

which would attend his departure, as well as his subsequent resurrection in a glorified body, in order that he might redeem us from the penalty of sin, and restore our bodies to the original purity in which Adam was created, as fit habitations of the Spirit, and meet for worshippers of the all-perfect God. His allusion to the temple, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up;" to the lifting up the serpent by Moses in the wilderness, "And if I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to me:" but more especially his discourse in answer to the question, "Tell us when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world," were intended to enlighten their minds upon the subject of his mission, and prepare them for the events which were necessary to the fulfilment of prophecy, and the accomplishment of the divine scheme for the redemption of mankind. Yet so little were the disciples familiar with, or reconciled to these circumstances which contradicted their expectation of an earthly kingdom, that upon the first attempt of the civil power to arrest him they forsook him

and fled, and thrice was he denied by Saint Peter in the hall of judgment. After the crucifixion they appear to have remained at Jerusalem in doubt and apprehension, alarmed for their personal safety, and uncertain of the issue of that great event. The appearances of Jesus after that he was risen are recorded by the Evangelists, and the want of faith so openly exhibited by Saint Thomas seems to have been providentially instrumental in directing the disciples to the most palpable proofs of the reality of that body which was still material, although no longer borne down by the corruptions of the flesh, and already fitted for the enjoyment of happiness and immortality. The existence of the soul after death was the general creed of the Jews: but the Sadducees, who denied that there was either angel or spirit, disputed also the resurrection of the body, vainly imagining that if it were translated, it must of necessity carry with it into the heavenly mansions the same inclinations and passions which had attended its earthly career, and which must render it no suitable inhabitant of those regions of purity and bliss. In order,

therefore, further to convince them of the reality of his bodily existence, our Saviour remained forty days upon earth, conversing with them freely, continuing in the breaking of bread, and eating in their company. On the last of these occasions, which is mentioned by Saint John, he appeared to seven of them on the sea-coast, after they had toiled all night in the deep, and been unsuccessful. The disciples knew him not at first; and before they recognized him, he directed them to the right side of the ship, where they caught so miraculous a draught of fishes that it was with difficulty dragged to the shore. He at the same time offered them a further proof of his divine power by the manner in which he supplied their immediate wants, and of his condescension afterwards in partaking with them of the repast. Having thus proved that, after he had risen, he had incorporated the mortal nature with the divine, he proceeded to put to Saint Peter the question included in my text, and which was followed by the injunction, whose observance appears to me to furnish an appropriate subject for the consideration and practice of this day. "So

when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, feed my lambs." Some persons have thought that the question "lovest thou me more than these?" had reference to the disciples who were standing around them; but upon examination it will be evident that it alluded to the employment of fishing, in which the Apostle had so lately been engaged. It could not have respect to the affections of the rest, because it would in that case have supposed Saint Peter to have been acquainted with the secrets of their hearts. And it is evident that the Apostle applied no such meaning to the words, for he answered without drawing any comparison between their feelings and his own. In fact, it alluded very appropriately to that which had been his original pursuit before he was called to the ministry, and to which he might be supposed to feel at the moment a returning attachment, in consequence of the wonderful success which had attended him. Nothing more then was requisite in reply than the

simple and forcible declaration to which he gave utterance, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." We are informed that the question was thrice repeated, and thrice received nearly the same answer, accompanied however the last time with an acknowledgment of the omniscience of Christ Jesus, and consequently that he inherited all the powers of the Godhead, contained in those remarkable words, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." It has also been observed that our blessed Lord thus gave Saint Peter an opportunity of publicly avowing his faith as often as he had publicly denied him; and in the command which follows, he requires a convincing and lasting proof of his affection and obedience. So that the conversation and injunction arise very naturally out of the occurrences which had previously taken place. Saint Peter had thrice denied his Master with oaths, notwithstanding his profession that he would rather die with him; and having very lately received a commission to preach the Gospel together with the gift of the Holy Ghost, as mentioned in the preceding chapter of Saint

John, he was now found pursuing his secular occupation instead of attending to his spiritual office; and it therefore became a very natural enquiry, whether he had forgotten the important ministry to which he had been ordained, and preferred the indulgence of his bodily appetites to the love of his Saviour and his God. To his repeated avowal of affection and devotion, his Divine Master replies by the repeated injunction to "feed his flock." An injunction which must forcibly have reminded the Apostle of the prophetic assurance that he should be the rock upon which should be built "that Church, against which the gates of hell should not prevail." Brief then as was this command, it called up in his mind a variety of reflections, and might be paraphrased perhaps not unaptly in some such words as these. "You have been selected as a chosen vessel for the service of the Most High, with a promise that your labours shall be eminently successful, and that the doctrine to be preached by you shall spread and prevail in every corner of the earth. Elevated by the appointment, and presuming upon your own strength, you pledged

yourself to the support of your Master, and failed in the hour of trial. Having now received the gift of Divine Inspiration to assist you in the diffusion of the Gospel, you are still loitering away your time in vain and trifling pursuits, labouring for the meat which perisheth, and neglecting to execute those heavenly offices which you are indissolubly bound to support. If you bear a mind properly fitted to these duties; if you believe that the Son of Man has power to send you forth to preach the glad tidings of salvation, and you really prefer this spiritual ministry to that bodily exertion which is active in procuring the necessities of this life, confine yourself no longer to a simple declaration of your attachment. He, who loveth me, will be eager to fulfil my will, and 'the will of Him that sent me.' Seize the present opportunity, and be instant in the diffusion of those truths whose influence shall sink deep into the heart, and recal man from the pursuit of idle habits and criminal indulgences to Repentance and Faith; Repentance, which shall bow down the spirit softened and corrected at the throne of its Creator; and Faith, which,

having its eyes steadfastly fixed upon the cross of Christ, shall lead to every act of benevolence towards our fellow-men, and of piety towards God."

Such an appeal must, at any time, have had a powerful effect upon the mind ; but coming at this period, it exercised more than common influence, and called forth into action all the energies of the Apostle. In the grave of his Saviour were buried doubt, and apprehension, and terror ; and with him were risen all the nobler faculties which shone forth so brightly in his future conduct. The shame of having denied him, when surrounded by enemies, and weighed down with spiritual sorrows, entered into his soul, and roused him to that persevering and unshaken zeal, which accompanied him to prison, to judgment, and to death. They were no longer the sounds of mortal exhortation and reproof, exciting temporary fervor, which struck upon his ear ; a heavenly voice now instigated him to action, and the approaching departure of his Lord softened him to the most decisive proofs of attachment and regret. Gifted with the keys of a spiritual kingdom, he began to

contemplate with just impressions of its importance the dignity of his office; and the pomp and parade of earthly grandeur became trifling in his sight. His was a service of difficulty and danger, but success attended his progress, and his reward was a crown of immortality. He beheld an innumerable multitude of Christians of all ages and climes flowing into the church, and the scenes and glories of prophetic vision passed in review before him. "Lift up thine eyes round about, and see; all they gather themselves together, they come to thee; thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Then thou shalt see and flow together, and thine heart shall fear and be enlarged, because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee. The people also shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a great nation, I the Lord will hasten it in *his*," that is, the Messiah's "time."

Anxiously then and earnestly did the

Apostle labour to execute this command, travelling through various regions, and languages, and peoples, having ever before him the prospect of his bright reward. We are not to imagine, however, that the injunction was confined to him, or to the more immediate disciples of our Lord ; for every Christian partakes of, and bears witness to, the covenant of grace, and is thereby bound to extend the religion of Jesus by precept and example, and to endeavour to execute his will to the utmost of his ability. The sources of charity are ever open, and, though our means may be slender, we may still add something to the fountain-stream, as the largest rivers are supplied by tributary brooks. And our best and most effectual contributions are those which tend to remedy spiritual defects, and enable the young and unprotected to sit at the feet of their Redeemer ; and while their minds are yet soft and pliable, and their thoughts unacquainted with evil, to listen to his instructions, and be conscious of his unbounded love. This is the food with which Saint Peter was directed to feed the lambs of Christ ; and such was the food continually

imparted by the Great Shepherd of the fold, who had no temporal boon to bestow in his capacity as Man, and who never resorted to a miracle in order to supply the wants of his followers, unless the necessity were productive of a corresponding benefit. To children, on some occasions, he particularly directed his attentions, as being innocent and lovely, and appropriate emblems of that purity which alone can find admission into a heavenly kingdom. To guard them then from the approach of every thing which can leave a stain behind it, and to encircle their weakness as with a shield, is a most sacred duty ; and no thought can be more consoling than the recollection of having performed it. This will add lustre to our brightest days, and throw a gleam of sunshine over the darkest hours of calamity. It is the great redeeming virtue which, through the merits and blood of Christ, vindicates from sin and evil, and pleads, with unfailing efficacy, at the throne of the Eternal for him who possesses and employs it.

It is unnecessary for me to add, how ample a scope is this day afforded you, my Christian friends, of securing a heavenly

Advocate, by cheerfully contributing to the support of the village schools, for which I have undertaken to claim your bounty. You know the nature and design of their institution, and by your generous patronage have frequently approved them. The mode of instruction adopted there, is founded upon the Bible, that inestimable gift of the Omnipotent, which contains rules for our conduct in every situation and accident of life ; and which, if studied with humility, and diligently obeyed, will inevitably produce the fruits of tranquillity here, and happiness hereafter. Your continued munificence will make permanent the blessing, and prepare the path to an immortal clime. Transport your imaginations to that shore which witnessed the last commands of a risen Saviour, and listen to the earnest and repeated expression of feelings nearest his heart. How apt an image is the coast interspersed with cliffs, and broken with precipices, of the orb which he was about to quit ; and the neighbouring sea of that wide expanse which was about to receive him, the boundless ocean of eternity. It was while pausing upon the limits of both worlds, after having for ever

associated in his person the human and divine natures, that he gave utterance to the tender and affecting appeal, so entirely consonant with the terms in which the Prophet had described him. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead them that are with young." Could Saint Peter, could the disciples who were present, ever forget the admonition of that hour, when every tie of duty and of friendship conspired to bind it upon their hearts? Many of you, my beloved brethren, must, at some period of life, have lost the society of one who was dear to you,—a parent, relative, or bosom-friend, whose opinions you held in reverence, in whose judgment you have been accustomed to confide. When temptations and difficulties assail you, do not the precepts and advice of that person crowd upon the memory, softened by the recollection of intervening scenes, and irresistibly urge you to follow and obey them? Consider then, I beseech you, that it is no earthly relative who presses upon your attention the admonition in my text, but that Divine Person to

whom you are indebted for life and reason ; your Friend and Comforter, your Redeemer and your God. His all-seeing eye is this day witness to your conduct, and requires something beyond a lukewarm and spiritless obedience. Ever merciful and gracious, ready to supply your wants, forgive your errors, and pardon your iniquities, he expects you to manifest the same generous emotions towards the children of his love, and will reward you, not in proportion to your imperfect means, but in the spirit of his unbounded power. A soul reclaimed from evil, one infant mind rescued from the haunts of poverty and sorrow, will be an undeniable pledge of your reliance upon his promises, and of your eagerness to deserve them. A review of the unprotected state of these children, of their entire dependance upon your bounty for spiritual instruction, of their utter helplessness, and of that long train of misery and guilt, which without your intervention threaten to beset their path and intercept their prospects, must inevitably melt you to beneficence and pity ; but I prefer directing the appeal to your own business and bosoms, as the loadstone

which points equally to your temporal and eternal prosperity. As you look then for mercy at the fated hour of judgment, here exercise that mercy ; shew forth the genuineness of your faith in the fervour of your obedience, and let the foundation of your hope be—CHARITY !

SERMON XIV.

ECCLES. XII. 1.

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.

THE Book of Ecclesiastes was written by king Solomon in the decline of life, after that he had tasted of every pleasure, and experienced the vanity of them all. Anxious to guard others against the errors into which himself had fallen, he describes the pursuits of his earlier days, and their mortifying result; and concludes by stating his conviction, that "to fear God, and to keep his commandments," constitute the duty and the happiness of man. His exhortation to make the will of our Creator the rule of our conduct, is strengthened by a view of those symptoms of decay which precede the last inevitable

hour, and enforced by the momentous truth, that when the body returns to dust, the spirit will be summoned into the presence of its God. The diseases and imbecility of age are enumerated in order to enforce the necessity of early piety; and we trace in them the consequences of that deviation from the paths of religion and virtue, which at once makes the mind unwilling, and the body unable, to perform the duties for which we were sent into the world. Such visitations shorten the period of human existence, and are grievous to be borne; but they prove the merciful loving-kindness of him, who has not left man without a monitor, and who seldom calls him without warning to his great account. We all know how little youth is affected by the distant prospect of disease and death; and were life one scene of uninterrupted enjoyment, there is reason to believe that intemperance and the indulgence of the passions, would almost universally prevail over the fear of God, and obtain undisputed possession of the human heart. Such also would probably be the case if the time of our sojourn here were materially prolonged; as we may learn from

the Mosaic history of the world before the flood, when the life of man was extended to nearly a thousand years. The descendants of Cain having thrown aside all the salutary restraints imposed by their Maker, were little terrified by the prospect of judgment so far removed ; and the usual effects of intemperance were defied by that bodily strength, which enabled them to sustain so long the burthen of mortality. Happy is it for the renovated world, that their weakness, which continually subjects them to the ravages of disease, reminds them as continually of their dependent state ; and the few years which intervene between the cradle and the grave, leave no excuse for the neglect of the social and moral duties, and but little hope, that if we suffer the present moments to pass unimproved, we shall hereafter have opportunity effectually to retrieve them. Let us then consider how we may best employ our time, so as to look backward with satisfaction, and forward with hope ; consoling the inactivity of age with the recollections of a well-spent life ; and divesting death of his terrors, by enabling

the mind to dwell with pleasure upon the prospects of eternity.

The direction given us by the Royal Author in order to ensure these desirable results, is to "remember our Creator." Which remembrance is afterwards explained to consist not merely in an acknowledgment that we are indebted to him for our being, but in a life regulated by his fear, and employed in fulfilling his commandments. These commandments were delivered to Moses in the burning Mount, upon which God descended, surrounded by all those terrific appearances, which were best calculated to impress upon the minds of a stubborn and rebellious people a lasting conviction of his majesty and power. To the two Tables then we are referred for the rules of our conduct; and it is worthy of remark, that while they contain various injunctions against crime, the only positive duties commanded are, to "honour our parents," and to "keep the Sabbath." The hallowing the seventh day is declared to be ordained in commemoration of that portion of time in which God is said to have rested from the

labours of creation ; and to the exact performance of those duties which bind the child to the parent, length of days is attached ; attended of course by all those external circumstances which alone can render old age honourable and happy. It is impossible, however, to believe that Solomon intended to confine our exertions to these acts of piety ; and he, who should limit his moral conduct to the observances of the Law, would have made but little progress in forming the Christian character, and be ill prepared to appear at the tribunal of his God. The two Tables contain only the groundwork of morality, and were admirably calculated for the instruction of the Jews, who appear to have been sunk in barbarity and ignorance, unacquainted with the acts of civilization, and degraded by a long and oppressive captivity. Theft, murder, and adultery, are such gross violations of the social compact, as unfit men for the common intercourse of life ; and habits of idolatry were likely to ensue from the influence of Egyptian customs, and from the prevalence of superstitious rites amongst those nations, who inhabited the Land of

Canaan and the surrounding countries. The commission, therefore, of the most flagrant crimes, and such as were most likely to occur under existing circumstances, was thus imperatively forbidden; and the inculcating the necessity of works of charity and mercy was left to a continued succession of Priests and Prophets, animated by divine inspiration, and endued with divine authority. The Prophet Micah has summed up in few words the duties required of all who are anxious to fulfil the will of their Heavenly Parent; which are justice, mercy, and humility. The Author of the Christian dispensation has endeavoured to banish from society every species of hatred and revenge, by the command to "love our enemies;" and in the emphatic language of the Apostle, "true religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this; to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." Truly then, and efficiently to "remember our Creator," is constantly to attend the public service of his temple in grateful commemoration of his goodness; to pay a scrupulous attention to the wants

and wishes of our earthly parents ; to abstain from every species of violence and outrage ; to forgive sincerely and from the heart every malicious and injurious attack ; and to comfort " all those who are afflicted in mind, body, or estate ;" but, above all, to be ever ready to administer religious consolation to such as are " wounded in spirit." To these also is to be added the observance of prayer, that morning and evening sacrifice of the heart, which has been regulated by the instructions, and consecrated by the example of our Redeemer. Each of these particulars is well worthy a separate discourse ; I shall, therefore, confine myself at present to one which the peculiar circumstances of the times have contributed to render more important than at any former period ; I mean, the necessity of administering religious consolation to the poor and the unhappy.

Our blessed Saviour declared, immediately upon commencing his divine mission, that he was ordained " to preach the Gospel to the poor," and to console the broken in heart by the animating assurance that those who sustained, with resignation and fortitude, the

trials of this life, would be received into mansions of eternal rest. The example of his Master is the noblest legacy of a Christian ; and as every injunction delivered from the lips of that " Author and Finisher of our faith " is more strongly binding upon his immediate disciples, the dispensers of his sacraments, and interpreters of his will ; the offices of visiting the sick and comforting the afflicted, have been almost exclusively assigned to the Ministers of the Church. The alms of the rich and benevolent were formerly communicated through them ; and private exhortation upon such occasions was found sufficiently efficacious, in addition to the public services of the Church, to confirm the great mass of the people in that faith which leads to repentance. Protestants, however, began soon after the Reformation to differ upon important points, and the labours of the minister became of necessity more frequent, in order to guard against the fatal effects of heresy and schism. The enthusiasts of those days confined themselves to public preaching, or private admonitions to their enlisted converts ; the fanatics of the present hour forcibly make

their way into the chambers of the sick, and arrogate to themselves the province of eternal judgment. The death-bed is assailed; not in order to speak the language of consolation and peace, but to aggravate bodily affliction by the addition of mental anguish; and the unmeasured terms in which they consign their victims to future vengeance, have frequently produced despair, and sometimes even madness. Far be it from me to entertain you with descriptions of unreal misery; I refer to scenes which have actually taken place, and are daily recurring; and the frequency of which threatens to destroy all the supports of rational religion, and reduce the altar to a heap of ruins. All the individuals of a sect, who arrogate to themselves the exclusive power of interpreting rightly the Gospel of Christ, are equally zealous and active; and when we consider how much more the mind is prepared to receive impressions of terror than of hope, when harassed by temporal afflictions, and weakened by disease, we shall cease to wonder at the rapid progress which has been made in disseminating the doctrines of Calvinism amongst the lower

orders of the people. Against so overwhelming a deluge, the best exertions of the priesthood may soon be vain, unless their flocks will answer the warning voice, and unite their efforts to preserve in their original purity the essential doctrines of Christianity. Discourses delivered from the pulpit are too generally considered by the poor and unlearned, as words of course, which the preacher is bound to deliver in conformity with the rules of the establishment; and, instead of attending to the plain meaning of his instructions, their curiosity is excited by his tone, action, and manner of delivery. Novelty is above all things the great excitement to their attendance upon public worship; and while the prayers of our sublime liturgy are read, general inattention and neglect bear testimony to their wilful ignorance of the purposes to which the season of rest was dedicated by God. Even when private exhortation is given by the minister, the necessity imposed by his office detracts with many of them from the efficacy of his instructions; and thus the zeal and energy of private persons operate more strongly upon the feelings, and make their

way more directly to the heart. Those who dissent from our discipline, are conscious of this influence, and active to improve it to the advantage of their peculiar sect. Similar exertions in the members of the Church of England would be proportionably beneficial to her cause; and the minds of the uninstructed, who are too easily led astray by the appearance of enthusiasm, would thus be prepared for the reception of that seed which her clergy are instructed to disseminate in soberness and truth. As long as well-informed Christians are thoughtless of the effects produced upon their servants and dependants by the general tenor of their own life and conversation, and act as if religion were too dull and merose for daily practice, or fit only for the studied correctness and formalities of the Sabbath; can it be expected that their inferiors should adopt a higher tone, or embrace the promises of the Gospel as the fruitful source of hope and consolation? In every station it is natural to man to look upwards: the conduct of his immediate superiors, is his principal object of observation and comment: and to behold his daily

employer and his spiritual teacher united in animating his faith, and pressing upon his acceptance the gracious offers of a Redeemer, would lead him to meditate seriously and temperately upon the truths which are opened to his view by the Revelation of Jesus. The result of such an active union cannot but be successful; and that which was always a duty, is now become a matter of imperious necessity. I will venture to assert, that there is not an individual here, whose circumstances justify such an appeal, to whom some poor person does not look up for assistance in the hour of calamity and sickness, and for whose opinion he does not entertain considerable respect. It would be a noble employment of time to accompany such relief with some enquiry into the religious creed of the petitioner, and at the same time to justify the ways of God to man. To describe him as he really is, full of patience and long-suffering, plentiful in mercy, ready to receive all who will come to him through Christ, would greatly fortify the mind against the terrors of those who pretend to wield his thunders, while they deny his loving-kindness and

truth. The beneficial effects of such exertions would soon be apparent; and while they contributed to increase the sum of human happiness, they would exhibit the most convincing proofs of our faith and our obedience. Their recollection, mingling with the occupations and enjoyments of life, would invigorate our labours and heighten our delights; the keenness of personal affliction would be dulled by their report, and desponding and melancholy reflections take flight at their remembrance. To the objects of our care we should thus be a "savour of life unto life;" neither would our lamps have been trimmed nor our "loins girded" in vain; and should the grateful prayers of our reclaimed brethren rise to heaven in our behalf, it might be said of each in the metaphorical language of the Patriarch, "the smell of my son is as the smell of a field, which the Lord hath planted."

But while we are employed in offices of such momentous import, we must neglect none of the particulars requisite to form the character of a Christian. To abstain from evil is the first step towards well-doing; and I know of no means so efficacious in pre-

serving the mind from wrong impressions, and in exciting it to the pursuit of good, as the constant observance of public and private prayer. So fully was David convinced of its necessity and efficacy, that he resorted to it upon every occasion. "As for me, I will call upon God, and the Lord shall save me. In the evening, and morning, and at noon-day will I pray, and that instantly, and he shall hear my voice." Christ Jesus even dictated a form to his followers, in which he instructs them to address the Omnipotent by the endearing name of Father. The Church continues to adopt prayer as the most powerful instrument of good, as the surest mean to turn away wrath, and obtain mercy. No situation of life places us above this necessity, no engagement can excuse its neglect. All have something to ask, or something to deprecate. Few indeed are those who bestow a kindness upon a neighbour, or even upon a friend, without a request; and shall we pay less homage to the Almighty Disposer of events than is constantly required by man? He is the Giver of every good gift, and will never shut his ears to the invocations of his faithful people.

But if we would “so run as to obtain,” we must endeavour to pay him something more than the homage of the lips, and strive to worship him in spirit and in truth. It is impossible to approach God with fresh petitions, without expressing a grateful remembrance of former benefits, sincere contrition for past offences, and earnest resolutions of amendment. Such recollections are amongst the most beneficial effects of prayer, which, if constantly practised in early youth, will lay up such a fund of consolations for old age, as will enable us to meet the approaches of death with tranquillity and confidence.

Let us then, my brethren, resolve individually to put in practice the advice of King Solomon, and seriously examine ourselves whether there be any way of wickedness in us, while the grace of God yet calls us to repentance. Let us review the years which are gone by, and endeavour to recollect if there be any unrepented sin, which in the hour of calamity and death will weaken our exertions, and lie heavy at the heart. Let us not consider the exhortations of the Preacher as words of course, or matter

of amusement, but let every one weigh them in his mind, and apply them to himself. Our mortal existence is of limited duration; and the rapid decay of every thing around us is a perpetual warning to wean ourselves from earthly affections, and to "seek the righteousness and the kingdom of God." Yet are we too apt to say, "I will enjoy myself for a season; but after an interval I will curb my passions, sit down seriously to the great work of religious reformation, and dedicate myself with still greater ardour to the service of my Maker." Believe me, such determinations are an aggravation of guilt; for they argue an acquaintance with better things, a belief in the truth of Revelation, and an impious misapplication of the time allowed us to prepare for eternity. How are we certain that we shall not be cut off in the midst of our pleasures without warning; and can we conceal from ourselves how heavily such resolutions will add to our punishment? Or should we be graciously permitted to survive the intemperance of youth, how poor a sacrifice is the offering of a corrupted heart! how affronting is it to say to the Most High, "I have laid my health,

my spirits, my bodily and mental vigour on the shrine of pleasure; I now come to prostrate myself at thine altar, when my knees are too stiff to bend, and my lips refuse to perform their office. Having proclaimed aloud my devotion to the cause of sin, I now return to lisp out the praises of my God. Inability to keep up the revel has at last brought me to thy temple; and the near approach of judgment has forced me by terror to thy mercy-seat, to which gratitude for the bounties of thy hand, and the redemption purchased by thy son, should long since have drawn me by cords of love." The present hour is the only one in which we can make an acceptable offering of the heart; and perhaps it may be the last allowed for the performance of the sacrifice. Be not deceived. No one is so pure but has sins to repent; no one has so thoroughly fortified his mind by virtuous resolutions, as not to need to be constantly reminded of the duties which he has to fulfil, and of the final reward or punishment which awaits him. The farther we have wandered in the path of vice, the more difficult will be our return, and the more strongly will the gate

of life be barred against us. It is never indeed too late to entreat the forgiveness and supplicate the mercy of the Eternal; but when the career of the sinner has been protracted without compunction or restraint; when reproof has lost its sting by repetition, and the frequent warning been uttered in vain; repentance, to be effectual, assumes the character of terror, and the penitent is agitated by that deadly remorse of the soul, which shakes the frame almost to dissolution. He recoils from the brink of an unfathomable precipice; his vision of impunity is past; his day-dreams are no more. His pride, his wilful and infatuated blindness, his obstinate perseverance in evil, swell the catalogue of crime, and he is but snatched as a brand from the burning, when the flame for lack of fuel is on the point to expire. "Consider this, ye that forget God, lest he pluck you away, and there be none to deliver you." If the very thought of this calamity inspire dread, think how infinitely dreadful must be the reality when yourselves are principals in the event. Shrink not from the contemplation with that sensitive affection which, consulting only present ease, would cast a

veil over such vital considerations; rather awake to the full extent and urgency of the danger, and adopt the only means by which it can effectually be averted. Persist no longer in the course which you may hitherto have pursued with reckless indifference; look closely and narrowly into the state of your hearts; turn you at the reproof of heavenly Wisdom; set not her counsel at naught, lest she "also laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you." Difficult as it may at first appear to enter upon a new and untrodden path, the track becomes wider and less intricate as you advance: the scene changes: the wilderness recedes: the landscape begins to open, till at last it bursts upon the view in all the loveliness of summer beauty. Curb awhile the impetuosity of youthful passions, and contrast this prospect of unalloyed delights with those faded scenes which inevitably accompany the satiety, the peevishness, the dear-bought diseases of a premature and vitiated old age. Strive to enter in at the

strait and narrow gate, while health and strength may support you through the difficulties of your pilgrimage. Swerve not aside to the allurements of indolence or pleasure; at the periods of rest and enjoyment be temperance your handmaid, and prudence your guide; and while your eyes are steadily fixed upon that Cross which leads you, as a beacon, to the end of your appointed course, omit not to offer to the bounteous Governor of the Universe the humble strain of gratitude and love. "Whoso offereth me thanks and praise, he honoureth me; and to him that ordereth his conversation right, will I shew the salvation of God."

SERMON XV.

PSALM XC. 9.

We bring our years to an end, as it were a tale that is told.

THIS Psalm is said to have been composed by Moses, when God shortened the days of the murmuring Israelites in the wilderness. It contrasts, in the strongest manner, the vain and transitory state of man, with the eternal and unchangeable nature of the Godhead; and concludes with an earnest prayer, that we may be led so to meditate upon death, as to prepare ourselves for its approach; and that we may hereafter be deemed worthy to share the mercies which are promised us through the mediation of a Redeemer. Our church has thought proper to adopt it as part of its most solemn service, in order to impress upon our minds the vanity of human pursuits, and lead us to

the only source of lasting consolation in sickness and sorrow, the promise of the life to come. To this purpose it is admirably suited ; and if we consider ourselves now as attending the funeral of the former year, every clause of it will call up reflections calculated to make us wiser and better. When we enter upon a new portion of time, we scarcely cast our view to the end of it ; we think to crowd into it all the various pursuits of pleasure or of business ; and should we by chance entertain any favourite project, whose completion lies of necessity beyond its boundary, we are apt to think its duration eternal. This is more peculiarly the case in childhood ; but although every succeeding year reads us a new lesson upon the shortness of life, many arrive at the limit usually allotted to human existence without ever making the application. It is when we look backward that the scene is changed ; it is by reflection upon the past that we learn the fleeting nature of that which is to come. The events of a thousand years are crowded into so short a space in the relation, that they appear but as the history of a single day, or as a watch in the night. They are

carried away as with a flood, whose unexpected and impetuous waters sweep all before them in an instant. They are as a sleep, from which when a man awaketh, he thinks the time passed in it to be nothing. They are as a tale, which is forgotten almost as soon as told; and nothing perhaps can be more mortifying to our pride than the reflection, that a tale pleasingly related impresses the imagination, while millions of human beings pass unnoticed to their graves. Such considerations lead us to estimate the real value of our time, and to ask ourselves the serious and important question, whether we have employed it to the purposes for which it was bestowed? It was given us, not to be wasted in the acquisition of trifling attainments; not to be thrown away in scenes of luxury and riot; but to be applied in instructing the understanding, and improving the heart. Much of it is lost in sleep, and a still larger portion in the daily occupations necessary to our support and comfort; but there is sufficient left for active benevolence, for the practice of the moral duties, for diligent enquiry after religious truths, and for the exercise of that habitual

piety which traces all its blessings to the Giver of every good and every perfect gift; and which knows that to share the bounties of Providence with the friendless and the poor, is the purest enjoyment, and the best obedience.

Let us all look back upon the year which is past, and endeavour to recollect how much of it has been exercised in acts of beneficence, or in such pursuits as we can reflect upon with satisfaction. How many days shall we find to have been entirely dedicated to our private concerns; how many to the pleasurable intercourse of society; how few, how very few to the noblest ends of our being, the administering religious consolation to the unhappy! To many of us every returning sun brings another day, fraught with all which can give solidity to domestic peace; while hundreds of our neighbours are groaning under the weight of bodily afflictions, the want of necessary subsistence, and what is far beyond these, the wounds of the spirit. Have we been careful to shew by our conduct to these "unhappy partners of our kind," that we acknowledge the source from which our

own blessings flow, and that we are desirous to imitate the example of our great Creator, as far as our limited means permit? Have we made it our business diligently to inquire what is the nature and extent of those mental sufferings, which add so many additional pangs to sickness and sorrow? Some persons think that they have performed all which Christian charity requires, when they have given pecuniary aid, and scarcely allow themselves to believe, that those who are in a lower station can be subject to the common feelings of humanity. But the poor, as well as the rich, are dependant for much of their comforts upon the caprice of those around them; and to him who has none of the powers of procuring enjoyment which are possessed by his more affluent neighbour, to live under the same roof with a violent and malicious temper, or to be associated for life to a loose and profligate character, must be the heaviest of human afflictions. To him there can be but one source of consolation, the hope of a blessed eternity. And I know no better means of employing our time, than in exciting and cherishing that heavenly hope; in pointing

out the folly of all human schemes, the vanity of all human wishes : and in leading the mind onward to that prospect of never-fading joy, to which every hour brings us nearer, and which no bad passions will be permitted to disturb. To those persons who are not in the habit of visiting the sons and daughters of affliction, it will be matter of surprize how little they are in general acquainted with the promises of the Gospel, how much they need spiritual consolation, and how gratefully it is received. Such labour is never thrown away, although we may not reap its immediate fruits. When the body is wasted with disease, the first medicines applied have not always a perceptible effect, but they lay the foundation of a gradual and radical cure. So it is with the diseases of the soul. A mind, long accustomed to the contamination of vice, cannot be expected to recover immediately its natural tone ; it requires much of advice, of argument, of salutary reproof, to rouse it to a conviction of its own depravity, and bring it to a proper sense of its dependance upon him, whose invitation is particularly addressed to the lowest of mankind, who

“came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” If our endeavours are successful when thus applied, we have not only the consolation of having restored a lost sheep to the fold, but we have laid “up for ourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal.” Even if our exertions are unsuccessful, we have sown the good seed, which some more favourable opportunity may bring to perfection; and in this review of life, we dwell upon days thus spent with sincerer rapture, than upon all the weeks and months which have been sacrificed to personal indulgence, to the gradual destruction of the bodily frame, and to the gratification of passions which make still deeper inroads upon the soul. All else has vanished as the mist of morning spread upon the mountains; it is an idle tale unworthy our remembrance; but the record of the time passed in administering the consolations of religion is grateful as the noon-day sun, and its reward shall be eternal as the Judge who hears it.

It is impossible to display more strongly

the vanity of human pursuits than by asking whether in the past year there is a single day which you would desire to live over again? Is there any one event so unmingled with bitterness that you could wish to recal it? We may all sincerely resolve that, were the past to return, we would endeavour to employ it more efficaciously to our own improvement and the glory of our Maker; but those which we had marked for happier days have been clouded in their decline, and tempests accompany them into the night of time. We still reflect perhaps upon their former brightness with a mixture of disappointment and regret: but the heart, which is at peace within itself, and has humbled itself in the presence of its God, would not wish to have been spared a single sorrow, whether of punishment or of trial, convinced that he proportions the evil to our power of suffering, and that "with the temptation he makes a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it."

If such be the tenure of our being; if by far the larger portion be filled up with sorrows; if our pleasures when unmingled give so little satisfaction in the remembrance;

how grateful ought we to be for that providential care which excludes us from the knowledge of the future! We feel anxious to ascertain previously the success of our labours, vainly thinking that such information would be most advantageous in our progress through life. But we forget that, if we are destined to receive what will give pleasure in the attainment, by previously knowing the result we lose all relish in the pursuit; and if disappointment and misfortune be our lot, their continual dread is destructive of every present enjoyment. Against so fatal a faculty ignorance is the surest and only preservative; unless with this attribute of the Omniscient we also possessed that perfect and unerring wisdom, which can convert good and evil alike to our happiness and improvement. May no unhallowed hand dare to lift the veil which conceals from me my future self, and bring into one view all the multiplied afflictions which Heaven perhaps may have determined in its mercy to bring singly upon me! The loss of a friend endeared by a thousand acts of recollected kindness lies heavy at the heart; who then could bear to behold all the ties

which bind him to mortality unloosed, and his dearest connections dropping one by one before him into the grave? Who could hear with equanimity that his allotted portion of sorrow should be administered by the friend nearest his bosom, for whose life he would sacrifice his own? Such a discovery would destroy all mutual confidence between man and man; it would harass the soul with the continual reflection of anticipated evil; and there is reason to fear lest in many instances, where the mind is not sufficiently fortified by religious considerations, all the ills of life, bursting at once upon the perception, should overwhelm the senses, and hurry many persons uncalled into the presence of their God.

Let us then, my beloved brethren, remain satisfied with the knowledge of our present lot, and lift up our souls in humble gratitude to Him who has shut up the book till the time of the end. And while we look forward with pious hope to the consummation of all things, when the "Angel shall swear by him that liveth for ever and ever that time shall be no more," let us endeavour to gain instruction from the former year for the

better regulation of that which has lately commenced. Let us determine to dedicate regularly twice each day a portion of it to the service of our Maker, and never to neglect any opportunity of acknowledging our dependence upon him. Let us recal to mind all his tender mercies of old, and the unexpected blessings with which he has deigned to visit us. Let us wean ourselves from those fantastic joys which amuse us only to deceive, and limit our desires to the possession of such rational delights, as employ the faculties while they mend the heart. To the poor and the unhappy we should be ever ready to extend the hand of charity, and pronounce the accents of peace; and those who have nothing else to bestow should recollect that to their sick and afflicted neighbour they can give their advice and their prayers. This is the noblest exercise of time; this is "so to number our days as to apply our hearts unto wisdom." If we regularly exercise ourselves in these delightful employments, we shall lose our taste for every pursuit which is unworthy our Christian calling, and be astonished at the delusion which could ever be gratified with the empty

vanities of worldly minds. Every succeeding year, instead of being compared to an idle vision of the night, will leave behind it the recollection of some substantial good: a family rescued from penury and ruin, or a soul reconciled to the favour of its Redeemer and its God. And when we find our spirits flagging, and our natural weakness yielding to the obstacles opposed to our progress, let us occupy ourselves with the contemplation of our latter end, of the shortness of human life, and the instability of all its enjoyments. When Moses composed the ninetieth Psalm, God had declared that on account of their obstinacy and unbelief all the Israelites exceeding the age of twenty years, who came out of Egypt, except Joshua and Caleb, should perish in the wilderness. The usual limit of human life, as the Psalmist observes, is threescore years and ten; but the whole of this vast multitude were doomed to death before the expiration of the period between their quitting the land of Pharaoh and passing over Jordan. The prospect of being cut off at that age, when man is in the full vigour of his youth, must deeply impress the mind with salutary terrors; yet who can

say, my friends, that any of us shall survive till the seasons shall have completed their accustomed round, and we are called to meditate upon the conclusion of another year? Man, like the fading leaves of autumn, is continually falling around us; and every day, every hour, gives the repeated warning, "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die." Yet "who knoweth the power of thy wrath?" Notwithstanding God has so strongly, so openly manifested his abhorrence of sin, which originally brought upon the world the unlimited train of diseases, calamities, and sorrows, who ever turns from the never-ending round of business and pleasure, seriously to consider the effects of his indignation? We acknowledge his power, because its consequences are too plain to be denied; and when his "judgments are in the earth," we give perhaps a cold assent to their justice; but in defiance of admonition and example we continue our course, and dance to the torch which lights us to destruction. To-night to the revel! To-morrow—who shall declare it? This day and the next may be the festival of joy: the gilded vessel may catch the gale, and float

upon the billow; but the rock, the whirlwind, and the tempest are at hand, and only wait to overwhelm it more surely in the deep without sounding the note of preparation. Look then diligently, I beseech you, to the seamarks appointed to regulate your course; suffer not the warning voice to be uttered in vain; pause ere it be too late from the unsatisfying pursuits of the giddy and the ignorant; let it be the object of your emulation, your daily employment, to acquire that "wisdom which is from above," which inculcates unaffected piety and purity of heart; for "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and to depart from evil, that is understanding." Launched upon the ocean of life, our utmost prudence may not avail to escape the innumerable dangers by which we are surrounded; but it is in the power of every passenger to avoid making shipwreck of that hope, upon which depends our real and lasting happiness. When our Almighty Father allotted to mankind their various stations, capacities and opportunities, he made them all equal in that essential point, the ability to ensure his favour by improving the talents committed to their

care. Are you poor? You may rival the most affluent in the possession of heavenly treasure. Are you ignorant? The stores of true knowledge are abundantly multiplied in his Holy Word, and by the assistance of his ministers become easy of attainment. Are you sorrowful and afflicted? Eagerly embrace the consolations afforded by his grace, and both mental and bodily oppression will be readily forgotten in that inspiring confidence, which extends the view beyond this temporary scene to happier regions of purity and peace. With him is no respect of high or low, rich or poor, in reference to an immortal reward; all pass through one common inlet, the portals of the grave; and the uses to which they shall have dedicated this infancy of being, plead without favour or affection for their eternal doom. No wealth can bribe, no rank conciliate, no eloquence divert the settled purpose of that impartial Judge; virtue and vice, with all their nicer shades of discrimination, are accurately registered in the book of his remembrance, and sentence will be scrupulously adapted to the testimony of the record. With him "is no variableness, nor shadow

of turning." The declarations made in his mortal capacity will receive the sanction of the Godhead ; and being " the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever," his decrees partake not the inevitable nature of earthly judgment, but are equally free from the suspicion of error or partiality. The sinner, who persists in violating the laws of God and man, is assured of incurring the penalty of crime ; the sincere and active penitent is by the same authority assured of pardon and acceptance. Let it not be vainly imagined that the rigour of his justice will eventually be swallowed up in the abundance of his compassion ; the earth which we inhabit is but as a grain of sand or as dust in the balance, when weighed against the infinity of worlds which are rolling around us, and severity to a few may be mercy to a universe. Indulge not yourselves in fond speculations and curious enquiries ; cast aside that useless anticipation which leads astray the senses while it perverts the understanding. Above all things, mortify the heartless pride which, pluming itself upon superior grace and favour, degrades the Majesty of Heaven to the similitude of an earthly

Potentate, and would introduce into the court of the Most High the affections, the weaknesses, the passions of mankind. Withdrawing your minds from such unwarranted hopes, confine them to the consideration of your present state, and employ the interval of Time in preparing for Eternity. Deaf alike to the voice of indolence and pleasure, estimate the value of a few fleeting years solely as they may conduce to your immortal interests, and diligently apply them to the work of your salvation. Small as is the gratification derived from the retrospect of life when we are trembling upon its verge, few quit without regret their temporary abode, for few can look to the past without bitterness, or to the future without apprehension. And if the best of us feel alarm at that awful period, how strictly ought we to prepare the materials of our account, ere the sun which lights us hastens to his decline. By a proper use of his meridian brightness we shall be enabled to dwell with satisfaction upon the evening of his rays; and as we sink with him into darkness, may we leave behind us the lustre of

his unclouded set, as the mild and tempered emblem of our earlier course, and the earnest of that glorious morn, which shall usher us with joy into the presence of our Redeemer.

SERMON XVI.

ISAIAH XXXVIII. 10, 11.

I said, in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave, I am deprived of the residue of my years. I said, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord, in the land of the living; I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world.

WHEN Isaiah, the son of Amoz, was sent to Hezekiah, king of Judah, to warn him of approaching death, the monarch being childless, and dreading lest the root and progeny of David, of whose lineage the Messiah was to come, should be utterly destroyed by his unexpected decease, turned from the observation of his domestics, and gave himself up to humiliation and prayer. Venturing to plead with the Almighty for a continuance of his protection, he reminded him of the zeal with which he had maintained the worship of the temple, and earnestly represented the piety of his conduct. His petition was

heard ; the Prophet was sent a second time with favourable tidings, and the sun went miraculously backward ten degrees upon the dial, in token that fifteen years were added to his life. Hezekiah composed upon this occasion the animated and pathetic prayer, of which my text is a part, as a memorial of his recovery and his gratitude. Its commencement is forcibly descriptive of despondence and alarm. The subjects whom he had governed with paternal care ; the friends whose converse had been his delight, whose fidelity had been his support ; the awful and imposing services of the temple, where a nation joined the choir of praise and thanksgiving ; all rushed irresistibly upon his remembrance, and made him cling to the frail and perishing tenement of his mortal abode. The nervous and debilitated state of his body administered to his fears, and he trembled for the stability of the Church which he had been instrumental in restoring, and which was not yet sufficiently re-established, to resist without royal protection the attacks of its enemies. These considerations and this terror proportionably enhanced the joy of his deliverance, which

he embraced as the earnest of God's saving grace; and he determined so to regulate the course of his future days as to merit the favour of the King of Kings. "Thou, said he, hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption; for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. The grave cannot praise thee; death cannot celebrate thee; they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth; the living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth." The remainder of his life accorded with these pious resolutions; and having erred in his conduct to the ambassadors from Babylon, he humbled himself before the Almighty with such penitence and contrition as materially to delay those judgments, which had been denounced against his house and country. His reign was advantageous to the interests of his kingdom; his public and private conduct conciliated the esteem and affection of his subjects; and when he descended in peace to the sepulchre of his fathers, all Judah and Jerusalem united to do him honour, celebrating the praise of his piety and justice, and

consigning his virtues to everlasting remembrance.

It may be supposed that a circumstance so truly wonderful as the healing of Hezekiah's sickness, to accomplish which God visibly interposed by his Prophet, and which was generally known to the whole kingdom of Judah, must have had a corresponding effect upon all who heard it; and you may think, that if such an event were to happen in our days, attended by the same unequivocal marks of a divine revelation, none but the most abandoned sinners could be deaf to the almighty warning. Yet have none of you, my brethren, been so reduced by sickness and disease, so borne down and oppressed by calamity and sorrow, as to put the chance of deliverance at an immeasurable distance, and make the hand of Providence apparent in your recovery and restoration? And can those, who have been thus preeminently blessed, honestly declare that they have manifested a proper estimation of the benefit, and that, not confining themselves to present acknowledgments and temporary devotion, they have ever entertained so deep, so serious an impression of the

Divine goodness and long-suffering, as to dedicate their lives to the service of that all-gracious Being, to whom they are indebted for health and preservation? Should it be observed, that such circumstances are too consonant with the common accidents and routine of life to affect the general feeling in a powerful degree, but that "if one went unto them from the dead," snatched by miracle from the brink and precipice of the grave, "they would repent;" I must answer them in the words of the Patriarch on a similar occasion, "if they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy;" his birth, his sufferings, his death, were gradually revealed and accurately described; his triumphant return from the conflict with death and hell is attested by witnesses incapable of deceit; a voice from heaven proclaimed the dignity of his birth; and signs and wonders attended him from his cradle to his grave. His resurrection is most abundant in testimony, and most stupendous in its effects; the prodigies of olden time are lost in the com-

parison, and no evidence could be more convincing than the authority with which he taught, no eloquence so persuasive as the wisdom with which he spake.

Let this be the continual subject of our religious meditation, and while we dwell upon the affecting scenes which preceded his departure, let them lead us to the awful business of self-examination, and raise our souls in gratitude to the Governor of the Universe for the personal mercies which we have experienced. And let it ever be esteemed a peculiar mark of his goodness that we have not been summoned without previous warning into his presence, before our minds have been softened to receive his instructions, and listen to his commands. We are taught to pray in our public service against sudden death, as a most grievous calamity; for few, very few, have so thoroughly "cleansed their hearts, and washed their hands in innocency," as to be prepared at all times to render their final account at the tribunal of their God. Careless and idle thoughts are apt to intrude upon our gayer and unguarded moments; the world, and the world's pleasures too frequently occupy

our time and our reflections ; and who would willingly pass from the banquet or the social scene to the dark and silent mansion of the grave? Whenever it shall please the Almighty Disposer of our fate to recal the spirit which he gave, may we, my friends, be found by his messenger in the pursuit of those employments which accompany a life of active Christianity ; may some sickness, or misfortune, or instant danger, have reminded us to " trim our lamps ;" may opportunity be afforded us for more accurate preparation than the necessary business of life will always permit ; sufficient space at least to offer up a dying prayer through the merits of a Redeemer's passion, or to say with the first martyr when at the point to expire, " Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

It is in this instance indeed that death is most frightful to contemplate, but in all circumstances and at all times he is a king of terrors. To some persons he comes with pain and diseases in his train ; sleep and repose vanish at his approach ; an emaciated countenance and a wasted frame bespeak the last struggles of suffering humanity. Perhaps a few days since his victim was

surrounded with gaiety and splendour, indulging in every gratification which riches can purchase or health bestow. Where now are the vanities of life, and what is their amount? They are past, for ever past, and the soul sickens at the remembrance. To bodily pain is superadded vexation at the petty triumphs which once excited a feeling dignified with the name of happiness; disappointment at the little solid benefit derived from pursuits which were once considered the business of life; and remorse, unavailing remorse, for time mispent, for talents misapplied, for wealth squandered upon the idle and profligate, while the deserving were suffered to pine in misery and want. Such things are painful to describe, and bitter to reflect upon; but to such a man the protracted illness which precedes dissolution is a trial from the throne of mercy. In proportion as human scenes fade, and human views are humbled in the dust, the feelings are chastened, the heart corrected, and the soul seeks for repose, where alone it can be found, in the bosom of its Saviour and its God.

At other times, when the approach of

death is not accompanied with much bodily affliction, he brings perhaps the recollection of crimes which press down and overwhelm the soul; not only the neglect of positive duties, but the actual commission of flagrant enormities; not only the indulgence of personal vices, but the attempt to bring sorrow and ruin upon others. No pangs which rack the body are equal to these which terrify the mind. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?" For the terrors of a troubled mind there is but one resource: faith in an all-powerful Redeemer, who offered himself upon the cross as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, and who has by his blood washed out every crime which the hand of man can perform, or the heart of man conceive. Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth to eternal life, but every truly repentant sinner is invited to enter it. Mercy and salvation are proffered to all upon the same terms; the enjoyments of another world are not to be purchased by sacrifice and oblation for sin, but are offered freely to those who humble themselves with penitent hearts before Almighty God, who

have a firm belief in the merits of a crucified Saviour, and who really give proofs of a contrition which leads to amendment of life. "The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

But even when the heart is most pure in the sight of its Maker, and when the frame sinks by a gentle and gradual decay, there is something severely awful in the presence of death. Hope beckons onward, and points on high; man, clogged with the imperfections of his nature, still doubts and trembles. Or perhaps other objects disturb the tranquillity of his departure, and seek to detain the spirit on the verge of eternity. Friends and relations press around him, endeared by innumerable acts of kindness; children, left fatherless at an age when much of their provision and prospects is dependant upon his life; and possibly the chosen companion of his earthly pilgrimage, his support and comfort in all its dangers, expecting every moment to be deprived of their protector and her own. Such witnesses cast a gloom round the death-bed of the best men; and when the soul has most need of fortitude

and self-possession, they collect into one point all the most afflicting of human feelings, and interpose a last momentary veil between the hope and the certainty of glory.

It is unnecessary to remind you how deep an impression must be left upon the minds of those who have passed through any of these scenes, and been blessed with a happy recovery. Persons, whose passions are not chastened, whose affections are not purified by the influence of such inflictions, must long since have been hardened against the lessons of their heavenly Parent, and lost to the feelings of gratitude and love. Yet surely no spirit of mortal man can be proof against those supernatural terrors, which are increased by the debility of the corporeal frame, and heightened by a sense of approaching judgment. But as the natural landscape lessens in the distance, and the most prominent objects diminish to a point as we gradually recede, so likewise the heaviest afflictions become softened in the retrospect, till they insensibly disappear to the mental view, leaving too frequently neither memorial of their bitterness, nor trace of our improvement. The repeated

recurrence of melancholy objects is necessary to correct and fortify the soul; and we may deem it fortunate for our eternal interests that we are sometimes required to accompany a departed relative or friend to that dark and narrow abode, which is the last asylum of the body when separated from the spirit, and the most affecting memento to the living of their inevitable fate. Look around you, my Christian friends, and consider whether any of your own connections or acquaintance have lately bowed beneath the resistless stroke, to whom you have been accustomed to look up as abounding in those sources of happiness which cheer and embellish a life of retirement, and add to the blessings of domestic peace, by swelling the funds of Charity and Pity. A few months might shew you how surely man is wedded to calamity, and how necessary an Almighty Parent deems the experience of sorrows even for those, who apply the gift to the purposes of the Bestower, and regulate their life between fear and obedience. The youthful and the aged friend are summoned alike to their account; the child is snatched from the parent, the husband from

the partner of his bosom; and a short respite permitted to melancholy reflection upon past endearments gradually prepares the widowed mourner for suffering and for death. In some instances the trial is painful and lingering; in others the close is more sudden and unexpected. In all, the goodness of God is eminently displayed, who adapts to the circumstances of the sufferer the tests best calculated to prepare the soul for that eternal state upon which it is about to enter; and to impress upon survivors the uncertainty of our being, the precarious nature of all earthly enjoyments, and the necessity of cultivating instantly and unceasingly the graces of the Christian life. In your attendance upon the last hours of those whom you deplore, you must have witnessed the terrors of the unrepentant sinner, as well as the calm and peaceful resignation of the sincere disciple of Jesus. What then, think you, chiefly enables those who are called from a mortal to an immortal state, to bear up undismayed against the increasing weight of bodily affliction, and at last to welcome with tranquillity the most terrific of the messengers of the Most High?

What, but an early acquaintance with their Saviour and their God; an habitual dependence upon his goodness for the bounties of the present life, and a thorough conviction of his mercy and truth? The seeds of piety and faith, when sown in infancy, afford the fairest promise with increasing years, and are sure at a more mature period to bring forth fruit in abundance. I would strongly impress this important and consoling fact upon all whose children are dear to them, and exhort them to illustrate and enforce the precept by the familiar example of some pious neighbour, who has yielded his parting breath in the well-founded security of confidence and hope. The best legacy bequeathed by the worthy and the good is the instructive lesson of their life; and it is a lesson, of whose benefits we are seldom sufficiently sensible, till the moral teachers are past recal, and their sentiments and actions come softened to the remembrance. It then becomes an act of justice, as well as of public advantage, to record the virtues of departed worth; and every individual should delight to enumerate the good actions of the deceased, and the kindnesses

which he has himself received. Such recollections direct and regulate the mental powers, and increase the sum of those inestimable consolations, which wean the unfortunate from brooding upon present calamity, and give them the assurance of an after-life of happiness and glory. And when pining sickness preys upon the vigour of our manhood, or the wasted and shattered form of old age sinks by a general and gradual decay, we shall dwell with additional satisfaction and delight upon those virtuous examples which have pointed us the road to an everlasting inheritance, and encouraged us to persevere in its pursuit. Then will their image return upon the memory, purified from earthly dross; and, if we shall have conformed our practice to the precedent of their lives, they will be to us the harbingers of joy and peace, and our spiritual conductors into that eternal presence, where "tears shall be wiped from off all faces," and "the pure in heart shall see their God."

THE END.

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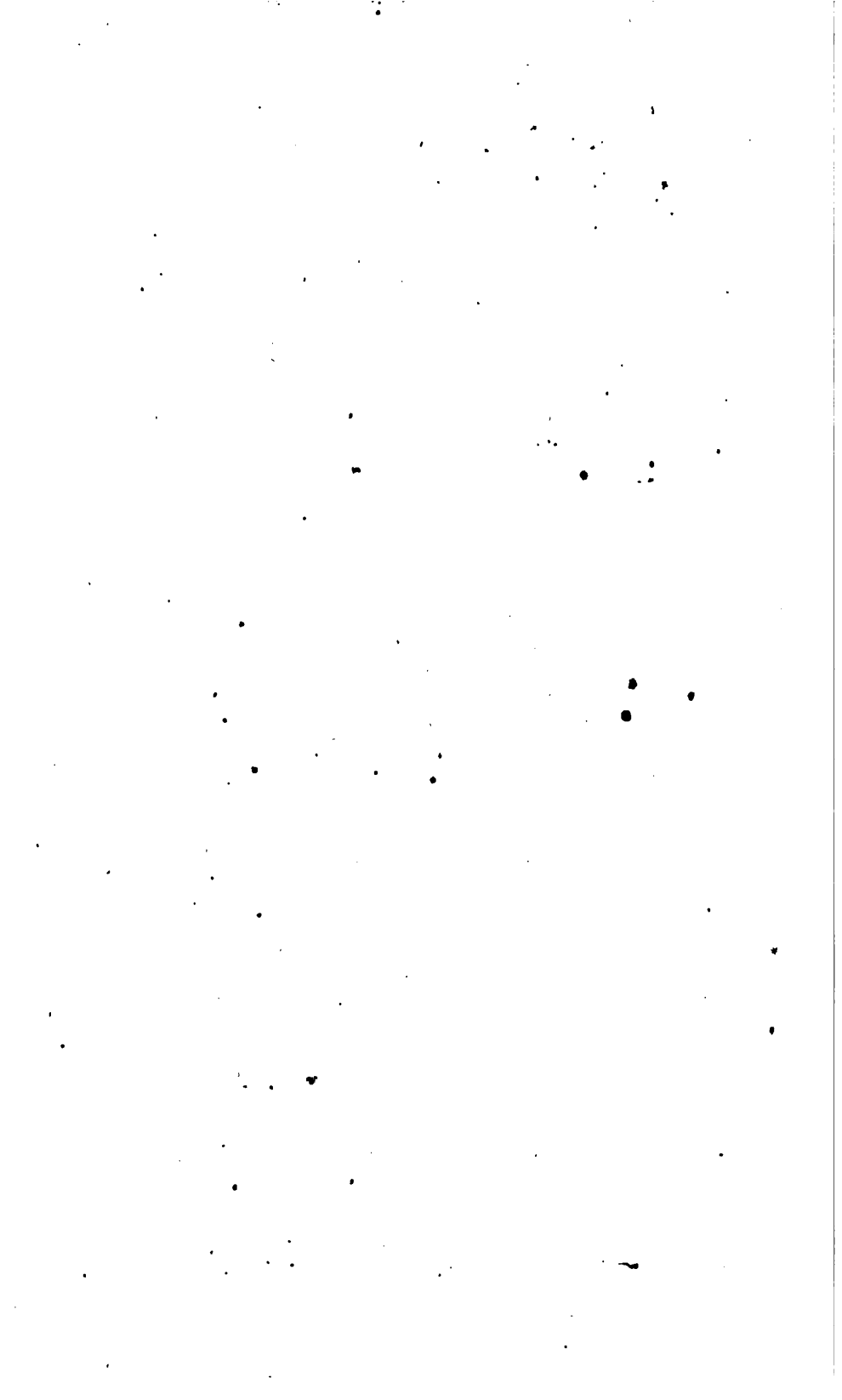
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